Indian History
3rd Century BCE

Theodore Thompson



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Chapter 1

Ashoka

- **Ashoka** also known as **Ashoka the Great**, was an Indian emperor of the Maurya Dynasty, who ruled almost all of the Indian subcontinent from c. 268 to 232 BCE. A grandson of the dynasty's founder Chandragupta Maurya, Ashoka promoted the spread of Buddhism across ancient Asia. Considered by many to be one of India's greatest emperors, Ashoka expanded Chandragupta's empire to reign over a realm stretching from present-day Afghanistan in the west to Bangladesh in the east. It covered the entire Indian subcontinent except for parts of present-day Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala. The empire's capital was Pataliputra (in Magadha, present-day Patna), with provincial capitals at Taxila and Ujjain.

Ashoka waged a destructive war against the state of Kalinga (modern Odisha), which he conquered in about 260 BCE. According to an interpretation of his Edicts, he converted to Buddhism after witnessing the mass deaths of the Kalinga War, which he had waged out of a desire for conquest and which reportedly directly resulted in more than 100,000 deaths and 150,000 deportations. He is remembered for the Ashoka pillars and edicts, for sending Buddhist monks to Sri Lanka and Central Asia, and for establishing monuments marking several significant sites in the life of Gautama Buddha.

Beyond the Edicts of Ashoka, biographical information about him relies on legends written centuries later, such as the 2nd-

century CE *Ashokavadana* ("*Narrative of Ashoka*", a part of the *Divyavadana*), and in the Sri Lankan text *Mahavamsa* ("*Great Chronicle*"). The emblem of the modern Republic of India is an adaptation of the Lion Capital of Ashoka. His Sanskrit name "*Aśoka*" means "painless, without sorrow" (the *a* privativum and *śoka*, "pain, distress"). In his edicts, he is referred to as *Devānāmpriya* (Pali *Devāna▯piya* or "the Beloved of the Gods"), and *Priyadarśin* or Priyadarshi (Pali *Piyadasī* or "He who regards everyone with affection"). His fondness for a tree is the reason for his name being connected to the "Ashoka tree" or *Saraca indica*, and this is referenced in the *Ashokavadana*.

In *The Outline of History* (1920), H.G. Wells wrote, "Amidst the tens of thousands of names of monarchs that crowd the columns of history, their majesties and graciousnesses and serenities and royal highnesses and the like, the name of Ashoka shines, and shines, almost alone, a star."

Sources of information

Information about Ashoka comes from his own inscriptions; other inscriptions that mention him or are possibly from his reign; and ancient literature, especially Buddhist texts. These sources often contradict each other, although various historians have attempted to correlate their testimony. Plenty is known or not known, and so, for example, while Ashoka is often attributed with building many hospitals during his time, there is no clear evidence any hospitals existed in ancient India during the 3rd century BC or that Ashoka was responsible for commissioning the construction of any.

Inscriptions

Ashoka's own inscriptions are the earliest self-representations of an imperial power in the Indian subcontinent. However, these inscriptions are focused mainly on the topic of *dhamma*, and provide little information regarding other aspects of the Maurya state and society. Even on the topic of *dhamma*, the content of these inscriptions cannot be taken at face value: in words of American academic John S. Strong, it is sometimes useful to think of Ashoka's messages as propaganda by a politician whose aim is to present a favourable image of himself and his administration, rather than record historical facts.

A small number of other inscriptions also provide some information about Ashoka. For example, he finds a mention in the 2nd century Junagadh rock inscription of Rudradaman. An inscription discovered at Sirkap mentions a lost word beginning with "Priy", which is theorised to be Ashoka's title "Priyadarshi", although this is not certain. Some other inscriptions, such as the Sohgaura copper plate inscription, have been tentatively dated to Ashoka's period by a section of scholars, although this is contested by others.

Buddhist legends

Much of the information about Ashoka comes from Buddhist legends, which present him as a great, ideal king. These legends appear in texts that are not contemporary to Ashoka, and were composed by Buddhist authors, who used various stories to illustrate the impact of their faith on Ashoka. This makes it necessary to exercise caution while relying on them for historical information. Among modern scholars, opinions

range from downright dismissal of these legends as mythological to acceptance of all historical portions that seem plausible.

The Buddhist legends about Ashoka exist in several languages, including Sanskrit, Pali, Tibetan, Chinese, Burmese, Sinhala, Thai, Lao, and Khotanese. All these legends can be traced to two primary traditions:

- the North Indian tradition preserved in the Sanskrit-language texts such as *Divyavadana* (including its constituent *Ashokavadana*); and Chinese sources such as *A-yü wang chuan* and *A-yü wang ching*.
- the Sri Lankan tradition preserved in Pali-lanuage texts, such as *Dipavamsa*, *Mahavamsa*, *Vamsatthapakasini* (a commentary on *Mahavamsa*), Buddhaghosha's commentary on the Vinaya, and *Samanta-pasadika*.

There are several major differences between the two traditions. For example, the Sri Lankan tradition emphasises Ashoka's role in convening the Third Buddhist council, and his dispatch of several missionaries to distant regions, including his son Mahinda to Sri Lanka. However, the North Indian tradition makes no mention of these events, and describes other events not found in the Sri Lankan tradition, such as a story about another son named Kunala.

Even while narrating the common stories, the two traditions diverge in several ways. For example, both *Ashokavadana* and *Mahavamsa* mention that Ashoka's queen Tishyarakshita had the Bodhi Tree destroyed. In *Ashokavadana*, the queen manages to have the tree healed after she realises her mistake.

In the *Mahavamsa*, she permanently destroys the tree, but only after a branch of the tree has been transplanted in Sri Lanka. In another story, both the texts describe Ashoka's unsuccessful attempts to collect a relic of Gautama Buddha from Ramagrama. In *Ashokavadana*, he fails to do so because he cannot match the devotion of the Nagas who hold the relic; however, in the *Mahavamsa*, he fails to do so because the Buddha had destined the relic to be enshrined by king Dutthagamani of Sri Lanka. Using such stories, the *Mahavamsa* glorifies Sri Lanka as the new preserve of Buddhism.

Other sources

Numismatic, sculptural, and archaeological evidence supplements research on Ashoka. Ashoka's name appears in the lists of Mauryan kings in the various Puranas, but these texts do not provide further details about him, as their Brahmanical authors were not patronised by the Mauryans. Other texts, such as the *Arthashastra* and *Indica of Megasthenes*, which provide general information about the Maurya period, can also be used to make inferences about Ashoka's reign. However, the *Arthashastra* is a normative text that focuses on an ideal rather than a historical state, and its dating to the Mauryan period is a subject of debate. The *Indica* is a lost work, and only parts of it survive in form of paraphrases in later writings.

The 12th-century text *Rajatarangini* mentions a Kashmiri king Ashoka of Gonandiya dynasty who built several stupas: some scholars, such as Aurel Stein, have identified this king with

the Maurya king Ashoka; others, such as Ananda W. P. Guruge dismiss this identification as inaccurate.

Alternative interpretation of the epigraphic evidence

For some scholars such as Christopher I. Beckwith, Ashoka, whose name only appears in the Minor Rock Edicts, should be differentiated from the ruler Piyadasi, or *Devanampiya* Piyadasi (i.e. "Beloved of the Gods Piyadasi", "Beloved of the Gods" being a fairly widespread title for "King"), who is named as the author of the Major Pillar Edicts and the Major Rock Edicts. This inscriptional evidence may suggest that these were two different rulers. According to him, Piyadasi was living in the 3rd century BCE, probably the son of Chandragupta Maurya known to the Greeks as Amitrochates, and only advocating for piety ("Dharma") in his Major Pillar Edicts and Major Rock Edicts, without ever mentioning Buddhism, the Buddha or the Samgha. Also, the geographical spread of his inscription shows that Piyadasi ruled a vast Empire, contiguous with the Seleucid Empire in the West.

On the contrary, for Beckwith, Ashoka was a later king of the 1st–2nd century CE, whose name only appears explicitly in the Minor Rock Edicts and allusively in the Minor Pillar Edicts, and who does mention the Buddha and the Samgha, explicitly promoting Buddhism. His inscriptions cover a very different and much smaller geographical area, clustering in Central India. According to Beckwith, the inscriptions of this later Ashoka were typical of the later forms of "normative Buddhism", which are well attested from inscriptions and Gandhari manuscripts dated to the turn of the millennium, and around the time of the Kushan Empire. The quality of the

inscriptions of this Ashoka is significantly lower than the quality of the inscriptions of the earlier Piyadasi.

Names and titles

The name "A-shoka" literally means "without sorrow". According to an *Ashokavadana* legend, his mother gave him this name because his birth removed her sorrows.

The name Priyadasi is associated with Ashoka in the 3rd–4th century CE *Dipavamsa*. The term literally means "he who regards amiably", or "of gracious mien" (Sanskrit: Priya-darshi). It may have been a regnal name adopted by Ashoka.

Ashoka's inscriptions mention his title *Devanampiya* (Sanskrit: *Devanampriya*, "Beloved of the Gods"). The identification of Devanampiya and Ashoka as the same person is established by the Maski and Gujarra inscriptions, which use both these terms for the king. The title was adopted by other kings, including the contemporary king Devanampiya Tissa of Anuradhapura and Ashoka's descendant Dasharatha Maurya.

Early life

Ashoka's own inscriptions do not describe his early life, and much of the information on this topic comes from apocryphal legends written hundreds of years after him. While these legends include obviously fictitious details such as narratives of Ashoka's past lives, they include some plausible historical details about Ashoka's period.

Date

- The exact date of Ashoka's birth is not certain, as the extant contemporary Indian texts did not record such details. It is known that he lived in the 3rd century BCE, as his inscriptions mention several contemporary rulers whose dates are known with more certainty, such as Antiochus II Theos, Ptolemy II Philadelphus, Antigonus II Gonatas, Magas of Cyrene, and Alexander (of Epirus or Corinth). Thus, Ashoka must have been born sometime in the late 4th century BCE or early 3rd century BCE (c. 304 BCE),

Ancestry

Ashoka's own inscriptions are fairly detailed, but make no mention of his ancestors. Other sources, such as the Puranas and the *Mahavamsa* state that his father was the Mauryan emperor Bindusara, and his grandfather was Chandragupta – the founder of the Empire. The *Ashokavadana* also names his father as Bindusara, but traces his ancestry to Buddha's contemporary king Bimbisara, through Ajatashatru, Udayin, Munda, Kakavarnin, Sahalin, Tulakuchi, Mahamandala, Prasenajit, and Nanda. The 16th century Tibetan monk Taranatha, whose account is a distorted version of the earlier traditions, describes Ashoka as the illegitimate son of king Nemita of Champarana from the daughter of a merchant.

Ashokavadana states that Ashoka's mother was the daughter of a Brahmin from Champa, and was prophesized to marry a

king. Accordingly, her father took her to Pataliputra, where she was inducted into Bindusara's harem, and ultimately, became his chief queen. The *Ashokavadana* does not mention her by name, although other legends provide different names for her. For example, the *Asokavadanamala* calls her Subhadrangi. The *Vamsatthapakasini* or *Mahavamsa-tika*, a commentary on *Mahavamsa*, calls her "Dharma" ("Dhamma" in Pali), and states that she belonged to the Moriya Kshatriya clan. A *Divyavadana* legend calls her Janapada-kalyani; according to scholar Ananda W. P. Guruge, this is not a name, but an epithet.

According to the 2nd century historian Appian, Chandragupta entered into a marital alliance with the Greek ruler Seleucus I Nicator, which has led to speculation that either Chandragupta or his son Bindusara married a Greek princess. However, there is no evidence that Ashoka's mother or grandmother was Greek, and the idea has been dismissed by most historians.

As a prince

According to the *Ashokavadana*, Bindusara disliked Ashoka because of his rough skin. One day, Bindusara asked the ascetic Pingala-vatsajiva to determine which of his sons was being worthy of his successor. On the ascetic's advice, he asked all the princes to assemble at the Garden of the Golden Pavilion. Ashoka was reluctant to go because his father disliked him, but his mother convinced him to do so. When minister Radhagupta saw Ashoka leaving the capital for the Garden, he offered to provide the prince a royal elephant for the travel. At the Garden, Pingala-vatsajiva examined the princes and realised that Ashoka would be the next king. To

avoid annoying Bindusara, the ascetic refused to name the successor. Instead, he said that one who had the best mount, seat, drink, vessel and food would be the next king; each time, Ashoka declared that he met the criterion. Later, he told Ashoka's mother that her son would be the next king, and on her advice, left the kingdom to avoid Bindusara's wrath.

While legends suggest that Bindusara disliked Ashoka's ugly appearance, they also state that Bindusara gave him important responsibilities, such as suppressing a revolt in Takshashila (according to north Indian tradition), and governing Ujjain (according to Sri Lankan tradition). This suggests that Bindusara was impressed by the other qualities of the prince. Another possibility is that he sent Ashoka to distant regions to keep him away from the imperial capital.

Rebellion at Takshashila

According to the *Ashokavadana*, Bindusara dispatched prince Ashoka to suppress a rebellion in the city of Takshashila (present-day Bhir Mound). This episode is not mentioned in the Sri Lankan tradition, which instead states that Bindusara sent Ashoka to govern Ujjain. Two other Buddhist texts – *Ashoka-sutra* and *Kunala-sutra* – state that Bindusara appointed Ashoka as a viceroy in Gandhara (where Takshashila was located), not Ujjain.

The *Ashokavadana* states that Bindusara provided Ashoka with a fourfold-army (comprising cavalry, elephants, chariots and infantry), but refused to provide any weapons for this army. Ashoka declared that weapons would appear before him if he was worthy of being a king, and then, the deities emerged from

the earth, and provided weapons to the army. When Ashoka reached Takshashila, the citizens welcomed him, and told him that their rebellion was only against the evil ministers, not the king. Sometime later, Ashoka was similarly welcomed in the Khasa territory, and the gods declared that he would go on to conquer the whole earth.

Takshashila was a prosperous and geopolitically important city, and historical evidence proves that by Ashoka's time, it was well-connected to the Mauryan capital Pataliputra by the *Uttarapatha* trade route. However, no extant contemporary source mentions the Takshashila rebellion, and none of Ashoka's own records state that he ever visited the city. That said, the historicity of the legend about Ashoka's involvement in the Takshashila rebellion maybe corroborated by an Aramaic-language inscription discovered at Sirkap near Taxila. The inscription includes a name that begins with the letters "prydr", and most scholars restore it as "Priyadarshi", which was a title of Ashoka. Another evidence of Ashoka's connection to the city may be the name of the Dharmarajika Stupa near Taxila; the name suggests that it was built by Ashoka ("Dharma-raja").

The story about the deities miraculously bringing weapons to Ashoka may be the text's way of deifying Ashoka; or of indicating that Bindusara – who disliked Ashoka – wanted him to fail in Takshashila.

Governor of Ujjain

According to the *Mahavamsa*, Bindusara appointed Ashoka as the viceroy of present-day Ujjain (Ujjeni), which was an

important administrative and commercial centre in the Avanti province of central India. This tradition is corroborated by the Saru Maru inscription discovered in central India; this inscription states that he visited the place as a prince. Ashoka's own rock edict mentions the presence of a prince viceroy at Ujjain during his reign, which further supports the tradition that he himself served as a viceroy at Ujjain.

Pataliputra was connected to Ujjain by multiple routes in Ashoka's time, and on the way, Ashoka entourage may have encamped at Rupnath, where his inscription has been found.

According to the Sri Lankan tradition, on his way to Ujjain, Ashoka visited Vidisha, where he fell in love with a beautiful woman. According to the *Dipamvamsa* and *Mahamvamsa*, the woman was Devi – the daughter of a merchant. According to the *Mahabodhi-vamsa*, she was Vidisha-Mahadevi, and belonged to the Shakya clan of Gautama Buddha. The Shakya connection may have been fabricated by the Buddhist chroniclers in an attempt to connect Ashoka's family to Buddha. The Buddhist texts allude to her being a Buddhist in her later years, but do not describe her conversion to Buddhism. Therefore, it is likely that she was already a Buddhist when she met Ashoka.

The *Mahavamsa* states that Devi gave birth to Ashoka's son Mahinda in Ujjain, and two years later, to a daughter named Sanghamitta. According to the *Mahavamsa*, Ashoka's son Mahinda was ordained at the age of 20 years, during the sixth year of Ashoka's reign. That means, Mahinda must have been 14 years old when Ashoka ascended the throne. Even if Mahinda was born when Ashoka was as young as 20 years old,

Ashoka must have ascended the throne at the age of 34 years, which means he must have served as a viceroy for several years.

Ascension to the throne

Legends suggest that Ashoka was not the crown prince, and his ascension on the throne was disputed.

Ashokavadana states that Bindusara's eldest son Susima once slapped a bald minister on his head in jest. The minister worried that after ascending the throne, Susima may jokingly hurt him with a sword. Therefore, he instigated five hundred ministers to support Ashoka's claim to the throne when the time came, noting that Ashoka was predicted to become a *chakravartin* (universal ruler). Sometime later, Takshashila rebelled again, and Bindusara dispatched Susima to curb the rebellion. Shortly after, Bindusara fell ill, and expected to die soon. Susima was still in Takshashila, having been unsuccessful in suppressing the rebellion. Bindusara recalled him to the capital, and asked Ashoka to march to Takshashila. However, the ministers told him that Ashoka was ill, and suggested that he temporarily install Ashoka on the throne until Susmia's return from Takshashila. When Bindusara refused to do so, Ashoka declared that if the throne was rightfully his, the gods would crown him as the next king. At that instance, the gods did so, Bindusara died, and Ashoka's authority extended to the entire world, including the Yaksha territory located above the earth, and the Naga territory located below the earth. When Susima returned to the capital, Ashoka's newly appointed prime minister Radhagupta tricked

him into a pit of charcoal. Susima died a painful death, and his general Bhadrayudha became a Buddhist monk.

The *Mahavamsa* states that when Bindusara fell sick, Ashoka returned to Pataliputra from Ujjain, and gained control of the capital. After his father's death, Ashoka had his eldest brother killed, and ascended the throne. The text also states that Ashoka killed ninety-nine of his half-brothers, including Sumana. The *Dipavamsa* states that he killed a hundred of his brothers, and was crowned four years later. The *Vamsatthapakasini* adds that an Ajivika ascetic had predicted this massacre based on the interpretation of a dream of Ashoka's mother. According to these accounts, only Ashoka's uterine brother Tissa was spared. Other sources name the surviving brother Vitashoka, Vigatashoka, Sudatta (So-ta-to in *A-yi-uang-chuan*), or Sugatra (Siu-ka-tu-lu in *Fen-pie-kung-te-hun*).

The figures such as 99 and 100 are exaggerated, and seem to be a way of stating that Ashoka killed several of his brothers. Taranatha states that Ashoka, who was an illegitimate son of his predecessor, killed six legitimate princes to ascend the throne. It is possible that Ashoka was not the rightful heir to the throne, and killed a brother (or brothers) to acquire the throne. However, the story has obviously been exaggerated by the Buddhist sources, which attempt to portray him as an evil person before his conversion to Buddhism. Ashoka's Rock Edict No. 5 mentions officers whose duties include supervising the welfare of "the families of his brothers, sisters, and other relatives". This suggests that more than one of his brothers survived his ascension, although some scholars oppose this

suggestion, arguing that the inscription talks only about the *families* of his brothers, not the brothers themselves.

Date of ascension

According to the Sri Lankan texts *Mahavamsa* and the *Dipavamsa*, Ashoka ascended the throne 218 years after the death of Gautama Buddha, and ruled for 37 years. The date of the Buddha's death is itself a matter of debate, and the North Indian tradition states that Ashoka ruled a hundred years after the Buddha's death, which has led to further debates about the date.

Assuming that the Sri Lankan tradition is correct, and assuming that the Buddha died in 483 BCE – a date proposed by several scholars – Ashoka must have ascended the throne in 265 BCE. The Puranas state that Ashoka's father Bindusara reigned for 25 years, not 28 years as specified in the Sri Lankan tradition. If this is true, Ashoka's ascension can be dated three years earlier, to 268 BCE. Alternatively, if the Sri Lankan tradition is correct, but if we assume that the Buddha died in 486 BCE (a date supported by the Cantonese Dotted Record), Ashoka's ascension can be dated to 268 BCE. The *Mahavamsa* states that Ashoka consecrated himself as the king four years after becoming a sovereign. This interregnum can be explained assuming that he fought a war of succession with other sons of Bindusara during these four years.

The *Ashokavadana* contains a story about Ashoka's minister Yashas hiding the sun with his hand. Professor P. H. L. Eggermont theorised that this story was a reference to a partial solar eclipse that was seen in northern India on 4 May 249

BCE. According to the *Ashokavadana*, Ashoka went on a pilgrimage to various Buddhist sites sometime after this eclipse. Ashoka's Rummindei pillar inscription states that he visited Lumbini during his 21st regnal year. Assuming this visit was a part of the pilgrimage described in the text, and assuming that Ashoka visited Lumbini around 1–2 years after the solar eclipse, the ascension date of 268–269 BCE seems more likely. However, this theory is not universally accepted. For example, according to John S. Strong, the event described in the *Ashokavadana* has nothing to do with chronology, and Eggermont's interpretation grossly ignores literary and religious context of the legend.

Reign before Buddhist influence

Both Sri Lankan and north Indian traditions assert that Ashoka was a violent person before his conversion to Buddhism. Taranatha also states that Ashoka was initially called "Kamashoka" because he spent many years in pleasurable pursuits (*kama*); he was then called "Chandashoka" ("Ashoka the fierce"), because he spent some years performing extremely wicked deeds; and finally, he came to be known as Dhammashoka ("Ashoka the righteous") after his conversion to Buddhism.

The *Ashokavadana* also calls him "Chandashoka", and describes several of his cruel acts:

- The ministers who had helped him ascend the throne started treating him with contempt after his ascension. To test their loyalty, Ashoka gave them

the absurd order of cutting down every flower-and fruit-bearing tree. When they failed to carry out this order, Ashoka personally cut off the heads of 500 ministers.

- One day, during a stroll at a park, Ashoka and his concubines came across a beautiful Ashoka tree. The sight put him in a sensual mood, but the women did not enjoy caressing his rough skin. Sometime later, when Ashoka fell asleep, the resentful women chopped the flowers and the branches of his namesake tree. After Ashoka woke up, he burnt 500 of his concubines to death as a punishment.
- Alarmed by the king's personal involvement in such massacres, the prime minister Radha-gupta proposed hiring an executioner to carry out future mass killings, so as to leave the king unsullied. Girika, a Magadha village boy who boasted that he could execute the whole of Jambudvipa, was hired for the purpose. He came to be known as Chandagirika ("Girika the fierce"), and on his request, Ashoka built a jail in Pataliputra. Called Ashoka's Hell, the jail looked lovely from outside, but inside it, Girika brutally tortured the prisoners.

The 5th century Chinese traveller Faxian states that Ashoka personally visited the underworld to study the methods of torture there, and then invented his own methods. The 7th century traveller Xuanzang claims to have seen a pillar marking the site of Ashoka's "Hell".

The *Mahavamsa* also briefly alludes to Ashoka's cruelty, stating that Ashoka was earlier called Chandashoka because of

his evil deeds, but came to be called Dharmashoka because of his pious acts after his conversion to Buddhism. However, unlike the north Indian tradition, the Sri Lankan texts do not mention any specific evil deeds performed by Ashoka, except his killing of 99 of his brothers.

Such descriptions of Ashoka as an evil person before his conversion to Buddhism appear to be a fabrication of the Buddhist authors, who attempted to present the change that Buddhism brought to him as a miracle. In an attempt to dramatise this change, such legends exaggerate Ashoka's past wickedness and his piousness after the conversion.

Kalinga war and conversion to Buddhism

Ashoka's own inscriptions mention that he conquered the Kalinga region during his 8th regnal year: the destruction caused during the war made him repent violence, and in the subsequent years, he was drawn towards Buddhism. Edict 13 of the Edicts of Ashoka Rock Inscriptions expresses the great remorse the king felt after observing the destruction of Kalinga:

Directly after the Kalingas had been annexed began His Sacred Majesty's zealous protection of the Law of Piety, his love of that Law, and his inculcation of that Law. Thence arises the remorse of His Sacred Majesty for having conquered the Kalingas, because the conquest of a country previously unconquered involves the slaughter, death, and carrying away

captive of the people. That is a matter of profound sorrow and regret to His Sacred Majesty.

On the other hand, the Sri Lankan tradition suggests that Ashoka was already a devoted Buddhist by his 8th regnal year, having converted to Buddhism during his 4th regnal year, and having constructed 84,000 viharas during his 5th–7th regnal years. The Buddhist legends make no mention of the Kalinga campaign.

Based on Sri Lankan tradition, some scholars – such as Eggermont – believe that Ashoka converted to Buddhism *before* the Kalinga war. Critics of this theory argue that if Ashoka was already a Buddhist, he would not have waged the violent Kalinga War. Eggermont explains this anamoly by theorising that Ashoka had his own interpretation of the "Middle Way".

Some earlier writers believed that Ashoka *dramatically* converted to Buddhism after seeing the suffering caused by the war, since his Major Rock Edict 13 states that he became closer to the dhamma after the annexation of Kalinga. However, even if Ashoka converted to Buddhism *after* the war, epigraphic evidence suggests that his conversion was a *gradual* process rather than a dramatic event. For example, in a Minor Rock Edict issued during his 13th regnal year (five years after the Kalinga campaign), he states that he had been an *upasaka* (lay Buddhist) for more than two and a half years, but did not make much progress; in the past year, he was drawn closer to the sangha, and became a more ardent follower.

The war

According to Ashoka's Major Rock Edict 13, he conquered Kalinga 8 years after his ascension to the throne. The edict states that during his conquest of Kalinga, 100,000 men and animals were killed in action; many times that number "perished"; and 150,000 men and animals were carried away from Kalinga as captives. Ashoka states that the repentance of these sufferings caused him to devote himself to the practice and propagation of dharma. He proclaims that he now considered the slaughter, death and deportation caused during the conquest of a country painful and deplorable; and that he considered the suffering caused to the religious people and householders even more deplorable.

This edict has been found inscribed at several places, including Erragudi, Girnar, Kalsi, Maneshra, Shahbazgarhi and Kandahar. However, is omitted in Ashoka's inscriptions found in the Kalinga region, where the Rock Edicts 13 and 14 have been replaced by two separate edicts that make no mention of Ashoka's remorse. It is possible that Ashoka did not consider it politically appropriate to make such a confession to the people of Kalinga. Another possibility is the Kalinga war and its consequences, as described in Ashoka's rock edicts, are "more imaginary than real": this description is meant to impress those far removed from the scene, and thus, unable to verify its accuracy.

Ancient sources do not mention any other military activity of Ashoka, although the 16th century writer Taranatha claims that Ashoka conquered the entire Jambudvipa.

First contact with Buddhism

Different sources give different accounts of Ashoka's conversion to Buddhism.

According to Sri Lankan tradition, Ashoka's father Bindusara was a devotee of Brahmanism, and his mother Dharma was a devotee of Ajivikas. The *Samantapasadika* states that Ashoka followed non-Buddhist sects during the first three years of his reign. The Sri Lankan texts add that Ashoka was not happy with the behaviour of the Brahmins who received his alms daily. His courtiers produced some Ajivika and Nigantha teachers before him, but these also failed to impress him.

The *Dipavamsa* states that Ashoka invited several non-Buddhist religious leaders to his palace, and bestowed great gifts upon them in hope that they would be able to answer a question posed by the king. The text does not state what the question was, but mentions that none of the invitees were able to answer it. One day, Ashoka saw a young Buddhist monk called Nigrodha (or Nyagrodha), who was looking for alms on a road in Pataliputra. He was the king's nephew, although the king was not aware of this: he was a posthumous son of Ashoka's eldest brother Sumana, whom Ashoka had killed during the conflict for the throne. Ashoka was impressed by Nigrodha's tranquil and fearless appearance, and asked him to teach him his faith. In response, Nigrodha offered him a sermon on appamada (earnestness). Impressed by the sermon, Ashoka offered Nigrodha 400,000 silver coins and 8 daily portions of rice. The king became a Buddhist upasaka, and started visiting the Kukkutarama shrine at Pataliputra. At the temple, he met the Buddhist monk Moggaliputta Tissa, and

became more devoted to the Buddhist faith. The veracity of this story is not certain. This legend about Ashoka's search for a worthy teacher may be aimed at explaining why Ashoka did not adopt Jainism, another major contemporary faith that advocates non-violence and compassion. The legend suggests that Ashoka was not attracted to Buddhism because he was looking for such a faith, rather, for a competent spiritual teacher. The Sri Lankan tradition adds that during his 6th regnal year, Ashoka's son Mahinda became a Buddhist monk, and his daughter became a Buddhist nun.

A story in *Divyavadana* attributes Ashoka's conversion to the Buddhist monk Samudra, who was an ex-merchant from Shravasti. According to this account, Samudra was imprisoned in Ashoka's "Hell", but saved himself using his miraculous powers. When Ashoka heard about this, he visited the monk, and was further impressed by a series of miracles performed by the monk. He then became a Buddhist. A story in the *Ashokavadana* states that Samudra was a merchant's son, and was a 12-year-old boy when he met Ashoka; this account seems to be influenced by the Nigrodha story.

The A-yu-wang-chuan states that a 7-year-old Buddhist converted Ashoka. Another story claims that the young boy ate 500 Brahmanas who were harassing Ashoka for being interested in Buddhism; these Brahmanas later miraculously turned into Buddhist bhikkus at the Kukkutarama monastery, where Ashoka paid a visit.

Several Buddhist establishments existed in various parts of India by the time of Ashoka's ascension. It is not clear which branch of the Buddhist sangha influenced him, but the one at

his capital Pataliputra is a good candidate. Another good candidate is the one at Mahabodhi: the Major Rock Edict 8 records his visit to the Bodhi Tree – the place of Buddha's enlightenment at Mahabodhi – after his 10th regnal year, and the minor rock edict issued during his 13th regnal year suggests that he had become a Buddhist around the same time.

Reign after Buddhist influence

Construction of Stupas and Temples

Both *Mahavamsa* and *Ashokavadana* state that Ashoka constructed 84,000 stupas or viharas. According to the *Mahavamsa*, this activity took place during his 5th–7th regnal years.

The *Ashokavadana* states that Ashoka collected seven out of the eight relics of Gautama Buddha, and had their portions kept in 84,000 boxes made of gold, silver, cat's eye, and crystal. He ordered the construction of 84,000 stupas throughout the earth, in towns that had a population of 100,000 or more. He told Elder Yashas, a monk at the Kukkutarama monastery, that he wanted these stupas to be completed on the same day. Yashas stated that he would signal the completion time by eclipsing the sun with his hand. When he did so, the 84,000 stupas were completed at once.

The *Mahavamsa* states that Ashoka ordered construction of 84,000 viharas (monasteries) rather than the stupas to house the relics. Like *Ashokavadana*, the *Mahavamsa* describes

Ashoka's collection of the relics, but does not mention this episode in the context of the construction activities. It states that Ashoka decided to construct the 84,000 viharas when Moggaliputta Tissa told him that there were 84,000 sections of the Buddha's Dhamma. Ashoka himself began the construction of the Ashokarama vihara, and ordered subordinate kings to build the other viharas. Ashokarama was completed by the miraculous power of Thera Indagutta, and the news about the completion of the 84,000 viharas arrived from various cities on the same day.

The number 84,000 is an obvious exaggeration, and it appears that in the later period, the construction of almost every old stupa was attributed to Ashoka.

The construction of following stupas and viharas is credited to Ashoka:

- Sanchi, Madhya Pradesh, India
- Dhamek Stupa, Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh, India
- Mahabodhi Temple, Bihar, India
- Barabar Caves, Bihar, India
- Nalanda Mahavihara (some portions like Sariputta Stupa), Bihar, India
- Taxila University (some portions like Dharmarajika Stupa and Kunala Stupa), Taxila, Pakistan
- Bhir Mound (*reconstructed*), Taxila, Pakistan
- Bharhut stupa, Madhya Pradesh, India
- Deorkothar Stupa, Madhya Pradesh, India
- Butkara Stupa, Swat, Pakistan
- Sannati Stupa, Karnataka, India
- Mir Rukun Stupa, Nawabshah, Pakistan

Propagation of dhamma

Ashoka's rock edicts suggest that during his 8th–9th regnal years, he made a pilgrimage to the Bodhi Tree, started propagating dhamma, and performed social welfare activities. The welfare activities included establishment of medical treatment facilities for humans and animals; plantation of medicinal herbs; and digging of wells and plantation of trees along the roads. These activities were conducted in the neighbouring kingdoms, including those of the Cholas, the Pandyas, the Satiyaputras, Tamraparni, the Greek kingdom of Antiyoka.

The edicts also state that during his 10th–11th regnal years, Ashoka became closer to the Buddhist sangha, and went on a tour of the empire that lasted for at least 256 days.

By his 12th regnal year, Ashoka had started inscribing edicts to propagate dhamma, having ordered his officers (*rajjukas* and *pradesikas*) to tour their jurisdictions every five years for inspection and for preaching *dhamma*. By the next year, he had set up the post of the *dharma-mahamatra*.

During his 14th regnal year, he commissioned the enlargement of the stupa of Buddha Kanakamuni.

Third Buddhist Council

The Sri Lankan tradition presents a greater role for Ashoka in the Buddhist community. In this tradition, Ashoka starts feeding monks on a large scale. His lavish patronage to the

state patronage leads to many fake monks joining the sangha. The true Buddhist monks refuse to co-operate with these fake monks, and therefore, no uposatha ceremony is held for seven years. The king attempts to eradicate the fake monks, but during this attempt, an over-zealous minister ends up killing some real monks. The king then invites the elder monk Moggaliputta-Tissa, to help him expel non-Buddhists from the monastery founded by him at Pataliputra. 60,000 monks (bhikkhus) convicted of being heretical are de-frocked in the ensuing process. The uposatha ceremony is then held, and Tissa subsequently organises the Third Buddhist council, during the 17th regnal year of Ashoka. Tissa compiles *Kathavatthu*, a text that reaffirms Theravadin orthodoxy on several points.

The North Indian tradition makes no mention of these events, which has led to doubts about the historicity of the Third Buddihst council.

Richard Gombrich argues that the non-corroboration of this story by inscriptional evidence cannot be used to dismiss it as completely unhistorical, as several of Ashoka's inscriptions may have been lost. Gombrich also argues that Asohka's inscriptions prove that he was interested in maintaining the "unanimity and purity" of the Sangha. For example, in his Minor Rock Edict 3, Ashoka recommends the members of the Sangha to study certain texts (most of which remain unidentified). Similarly, in an inscription found at Sanchi, Sarnath, and Kosam, Ashoka mandates that the dissident members of the sangha should be expelled, and expresses his desire to the Sangha remain united and flourish.

The 8th century Buddhist pilgrim Yijing records another story about Ashoka's involvement in the Buddhist sangha. According to this story, the earlier king Bimbisara, who was a contemporary of the Gautama Buddha, once saw 18 fragments of a cloth and a stick in a dream. The Buddha interpreted the dream to mean that his philosophy would be divided into 18 schools after his death, and predicted that a king called Ashoka would unite these schools over a hundred years later.

Buddhist missions

In the Sri Lankan tradition, Moggaliputta-Tissa – who is patronised by Ashoka – sends out nine Buddhist missions to spread Buddhism in the "border areas" in c. 250 BCE. This tradition does not credit Ashoka directly with sending these missions. Each mission comprises five monks, and is headed by an elder. To Sri Lanka, he sent his own son Mahinda, accompanied by four other Theras – Itthiya, Uttiya, Sambala and Bhaddasala. Next, with Moggaliputta-Tissa's help, Ashoka sent Buddhist missionaries to distant regions such as Kashmir, Gandhara, Himalayas, the land of the Yonas (Greeks), Maharashtra, Suvannabhumi, and Sri Lanka.

The Sri Lankan tradition dates these missions to Ashoka's 18th regnal year, naming the following missionaries:

- Mahinda to Sri Lanka
- Majjhantika to Kashmir and Gandhara
- Mahadeva to Mahisa-mandala (possibly modern Mysore region)
- Rakkhita to Vanavasa

- Dhammarakkhita the Greek to Aparantaka (western India)
- Maha-dhamma-rakkhita to Maharashtra
- Maharakkhita to the Greek country
- Majjhima to the Himalayas
- Soṇa and Uttara to Suvaṇṇabhūmi (possibly Lower Burma and Thailand)

The tradition adds that during his 19th regnal year, Ashoka's daughter Sanghamitta went to Sri Lanka to establish an order of nuns, taking a sapling of the sacred Bodhi Tree with her.

The North Indian tradition makes no mention of these events. Ashoka's own inscriptions also appear to omit any mention of these events, recording only one of his activities during this period: in his 19th regnal year, he donated the Khalatika Cave to ascetics to provide them a shelter during the rainy season. Ashoka's Pillar Edicts suggest that during the next year, he made pilgrimage to Lumbini – the place of Buddha's birth, and to the stupa of the Buddha Kanakamuni.

The Rock Edict XIII states that Ashoka's won a "dhamma victory" by sending messengers to five kings and several other kingdoms. Whether these missions correspond to the Buddhist missions recorded in the Buddhist chronicles is debated. Indologist Etienne Lamotte argues that the "dhamma" missionaries mentioned in Ashoka's inscriptions were probably not Buddhist monks, as this "dhamma" was not same as "Buddhism". Moreover, the lists of destinations of the missions and the dates of the missions mentioned in the inscriptions do not tally the ones mentioned in the Buddhist legends.

Other scholars, such as Erich Frauwallner and Richard Gombrich, believe that the missions mentioned in the Sri Lankan tradition are historical. According to these scholars, a part of this story is corroborated by archaeological evidence: the *Vinaya Nidana* mentions names of five monks, who are said to have gone to the Himalayan region; three of these names have been found inscribed on relic caskets found at Bhilsa (near Vidisha). These caskets have been dated to the early 2nd century BCE, and the inscription states that the monks are of the Himalayan school. The missions may have set out from Vidisha in central India, as the caskets were discovered there, and as Mahinda is said to have stayed there for a month before setting out for Sri Lanka.

According to Gombrich, the mission may have included representatives of other religions, and thus, Lamotte's objection about "dhamma" is not valid. The Buddhist chroniclers may have decided not to mention these non-Buddhists, so as not to sideline Buddhism. Frauwallner and Gombrich also believe that Ashoka was directly responsible for the missions, since only a resourceful ruler could have sponsored such activities. The Sri Lankan chronicles, which belong to the Theravada school, exaggerate the role of the Theravadin monk Moggaliputta-Tissa in order to glorify their sect.

Some historians argue that Buddhism became a major religion because of Ashoka's royal patronage. However, epigraphic evidence suggests that the spread of Buddhism in north-western India and Deccan region was less because of Ashoka's missions, and more because of merchants, traders, landowners

and the artisan guilds who supported Buddhist establishments.

Violence after conversion

According to the *Ashokavadana*, Ashoka resorted to violence even after converting to Buddhism. For example:

- He slowly tortured Chandagirika to death in the "hell" prison.
- He ordered a massacre of 18,000 heretics for a misdeed of one.
- He launched a pogrom against the Jains, announcing a bounty on the head of any heretic; this results in the beheading of his own brother – Vitashoka.

According to the *Ashokavadana*, a non-Buddhist in Pundravardhana drew a picture showing the Buddha bowing at the feet of the Nirgrantha leader Jnatiputra. The term nirgrantha ("free from bonds") was originally used for a pre-Jaina ascetic order, but later came to be used for Jaina monks. "Jnatiputra" is identified with Mahavira, 24th Tirthankara of Jainism. The legend states that on complaint from a Buddhist devotee, Ashoka issued an order to arrest the non-Buddhist artist, and subsequently, another order to kill all the Ajivikas in Pundravardhana. Around 18,000 followers of the Ajivika sect were executed as a result of this order. Sometime later, another Nirgrantha follower in Pataliputra drew a similar picture. Ashoka burnt him and his entire family alive in their house. He also announced an award of one dinara (silver coin) to anyone who brought him the head of a Nirgrantha heretic. According to *Ashokavadana*, as a result of this order, his own

brother was mistaken for a heretic and killed by a cowherd. Ashoka realised his mistake, and withdrew the order.

For several reasons, scholars say, these stories of persecutions of rival sects by Ashoka appear to be clear fabrications arising out of sectarian propaganda.

Last years

Tissarakkha as the queen

Ashoka's last dated inscription - the Pillar Edict 4 is from his 26th regnal year. The only source of information about Ashoka's later years are the Buddhist legends. The Sri Lankan tradition states that Ashoka's queen Asandhamitta died during his 29th regnal year, and in his 32nd regnal year, his wife Tissarakkha was given the title of queen.

Both *Mahavamsa* and *Ashokavadana* state that Ashoka extended favours and attention to the Bodhi Tree, and a jealous Tissarakkha mistook "Bodhi" to be a mistress of Ashoka. She then used black magic to make the tree wither. According to the *Ashokavadana*, she hired a sorceress to do the job, and when Ashoka explained that "Bodhi" was the name of a tree, she had the sorceress heal the tree. According to the *Mahavamsa*, she completely destroyed the tree, during Ashoka's 34th regnal year.

The *Ashokavadana* states that Tissarakkha (called "Tishyarakshita" here) made sexual advances towards Ashoka's son Kunala, but Kunala rejected her. Subsequently, Ashoka

granted Tissarakkha kingship for seven days, and during this period, she tortured and blinded Kunala. Ashoka then threatened to "tear out her eyes, rip open her body with sharp rakes, impale her alive on a spit, cut off her nose with a saw, cut out her tongue with a razor." Kunala regained his eyesight miraculously, and pleaded for mercy on the queen, but Ashoka had her executed anyway. Kshemendra's *Avadana-kalpa-lata* also narrates this legend, but seeks to improve Ashoka's image by stating that he forgave the queen after Kunala regained his eyesight.

Death

According to the Sri Lankan tradition, Ashoka died during his 37th regnal year, which suggests that he died around 232 BCE.

According to the *Ashokavadana*, the emperor fell severely ill during his last days. He started using state funds to make donations to the Buddhist sangha, prompting his ministers to deny him access to the state treasury. Ashoka then started donating his personal possessions, but was similarly restricted from doing so. On his deathbed, his only possession was the half of a myrobalan fruit, which he offered to the sangha as his final donation. Such legends encourage generous donations to the *sangha* and highlight the role of the kingship in supporting the Buddhist faith.

Legend states that during his cremation, his body burned for seven days and nights.

Family

Queens

Various sources mention five consorts of Ashoka: Devi (or Vedisa-Mahadevi-Shakyakumari), Karuvaki, Asandhimitra (Pali: Asandhimitta), Padmavati, and Tishyarakshita (Pali: Tissarakkha).

Kaurvaki is the only queen of Ashoka known from his own inscriptions: she is mentioned in an edict inscribed on a pillar at Allahabad. The inscription names her as the mother of prince Tivara, and orders the royal officers (mahamattas) to record her religious and charitable donations. According to one theory, Tishyarakshita was the regnal name of Kaurvaki.

According to the *Mahavamsa*, Ashoka's chief queen was Asandhimitta, who died four years before him. It states that she was born as Ashoka's queen because in a previous life, she directed a pratyekabuddha to a honey merchant (who was later reborn as Ashoka). Some later texts also state that she additionally gave the pratyekabuddha a piece of cloth made by her. These texts include the *Dasavatthuppakarana*, the so-called Cambodian or Extended *Mahavamsa* (possibly from 9th–10th centuries), and the *Trai Bhumi Katha* (15th century). These texts narrate another story: one day, Ashoka mocked Asandhamitta was enjoying a tasty piece of sugarcane without having earned it through her karma. Asandhamitta replied that all her enjoyments resulted from merit resulting from her own karma. Ashoka then challenged her to prove this by procuring 60,000 robes as an offering for monks. At night, the guardian

gods informed her about her past gift to the pratyekabuddha, and next day, she was able to miraculously procure the 60,000 robes. An impressed Ashoka makes her his favourite queen, and even offers to make her a sovereign ruler. Asandhamitta refuses the offer, but still invokes the jealousy of Ashoka's 16,000 other women. Ashoka proves her superiority by having 16,000 identical cakes baked with his royal seal hidden in only one of them. Each wife is asked to choose a cake, and only Asandhamitta gets the one with the royal seal. The *Trai Bhumi Katha* claims that it was Asandhamitta who encouraged her husband to become a Buddhist, and to construct 84,000 stupas and 84,000 viharas.

According to *Mahavamsa*, after Asandhamitta's death, Tissarakkha became the chief queen. The Ashokavadana does not mention Asandhamitta at all, but does mention Tissarakkha as Tishyarakshita. The *Divyavadana* mentions another queen called Padmavati, who was the mother of the crown-prince Kunala.

As mentioned above, according to the Sri Lankan tradition, Ashoka fell in love with Devi (or Vidisha-Mahadevi), as a prince in central India. After Ashoka's ascention to the throne, Devi chose to remain at Vidisha than move to the royal capital Pataliputra. According to the *Mahavmsa*, Ashoka's chief queen was Asandhamitta, not Devi: the text does not talk of any connection between the two women, so it is unlikely that Asandhamitta was another name for Devi. The Sri Lankan tradition uses the word *samvasa* to describe the relationship between Ashoka and Devi, which modern scholars variously interpret as sexual relations outside marriage, or co-residence as a married couple. Those who argue that Ashoka did not

marry Devi argue that their theory is corroborated by the fact that Devi did not become Ashoka's chief queen in Pataliputra after his ascension. The *Dipavamsa* refers to two children of Ashoka and Devi – Mahinda and Sanghamitta.

Sons

Tivara, the son of Ashoka and Karuvaki, is the only of Ashoka's sons to be mentioned by name in the inscriptions.

According to North Indian tradition, Ashoka had a son named Kunala. Kunala had a son named Samprati.

The Sri Lankan tradition mentions a son called Mahinda, who was sent to Sri Lanka as a Buddhist missionary; this son is not mentioned at all in the North Indian tradition. The Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang states that Mahinda was Ashoka's younger brother (Vitashoka or Vigatashoka) rather than his illgetimate son.

The *Divyavadana* mentions the crown-prince Kunala alias Dharmavivardhana, who was a son of queen Padmavati. According to Faxian, Dharmavivardhana was appointed as the governor of Gandhara.

The *Rajatarangini* mentions Jalauka as a son of Ashoka.

Daughters

According to Sri Lankan tradition, Ashoka had a daughter named Sanghamitta, who became a Buddhist nun. A section of

historians, such as Romila Thapar, doubt the historicity of Sanghamitta, based on the folloiwng points:

- The name "Sanghamitta", which literally means the friend of the Buddhist Order (sangha), is unusual, and the story of her going to Ceylon so that the Ceylonese queen could be ordained appears to be an exaggeration.
- The *Mahavamsa* states that she married Ashoka's nephew Agnibrahma, and the couple had a son named Sumana. The contemporary laws regarding exogamy would have forbidden such a marriage between first cousins.
- According to the *Mahavamsa*, she was 18 years old when she was ordained as a nun. The narrative suggests that she was married two years earlier, and that her husband as well as her child were ordained. It is unlikely that she would have been allowed to become a nun with such a young child.

Another source mentions that Ashoka had a daughter named Charumati, who married a kshatriya named Devapala.

Brothers

According to the *Ashokavadana*, Ashoka had an elder half-brother named Susima. According to the Sri Lankan tradition, Ashoka killed his 99 half-brothers.

Various sources mention that one of Ashoka's brothers survived his ascension, and narrate stories about his role in the Buddhist community.

- According to Sri Lankan tradition, this brother was Tissa, who initially lived a luxurious life, without worrying about the world. To teach him a lesson, Ashoka put him on the throne for a few days, then accused him of being an usurper, and sentenced him to die after seven days. During these seven days, Tissa realised that the Buddhist monks gave up pleasure because they were aware of the eventual death. He then left the palace, and became an *arhat*.
- The Theragatha commentary calls this brother Vitashoka. According to this legend, one day, Vitashoka saw a grey hair on his head, and realised that he had become old. He then retired to a monastery, and became an arhat.
- Faxian calls the younger brother Mahendra, and states that Ashoka shamed him for his immoral behaviour. The brother than retired to a dark cave, where he meditated, and became an arhat. Ashoka invited him to return to the family, but he preferred to live alone on a hill. So, Ashoka had a hill built for him within Pataliputra.
- The Ashoka-vadana states that Ashoka's brother was mistaken for a Nirgrantha, and killed during a massacre of the Nirgranthas ordered by Ashoka.

Imperial extent

The extent of the territory controlled by Ashoka's predecessors is not certain, but it is possible that the empire of his grandfather Chandragupta extended northern India from western coast (Arabian Sea) to the eastern coast (Bay of

Bengal), covering nearly two-thirds of the Indian subcontinent. Bindusara and Ashoka seem to have extended the empire southwards. The distribution of Ashoka's inscriptions suggests that his empire included almost the entire Indian subcontinent, except its southernmost parts. The Rock Edicts 2 and 13 suggest that these southernmost parts were controlled by the Cholas, the Pandyas, the Keralaputras, and the Satiyaputras. In the north-west, Ashoka's kingdom extended up to Kandahar, to the east of the Seleucid Empire ruled by Antiochus II. The capital of Ashoka's empire was Pataliputra in the Magadha region.

Religion and philosophy

Relationship with Buddhism

The Buddhist legends state that Ashoka converted to Buddhism, although this has been debated by a section of scholars. The Minor Rock Edict 1 leaves no doubt that Ashoka was a follower of Buddhism. In this edict, he calls himself an upasaka (a lay follower of Buddhism) and a *sakya* (i.e. Buddhist, after Gautama Buddha's title *Shakya-Muni*). This and several other edicts are evidence of his Buddhist affiliation:

- In his Minor Rock Edict 1, Ashoka adds that he did not make much progress for a year after becoming an *upasaka*, but then, he "went to" the Sangha, and made more progress. It is not certain what "going to" the Sangha means – the Buddhist tradition that he lived with monks may be an exaggeration, but it

clearly means that Ashoka was drawn closer to Buddhism.

- In his Minor Rock Edict 3, he calls himself an *upasaka*, and records his faith in the Buddha and the Sangha.
- In the Major Rock Edict 8, he records his visit to Sambodhi (the sacred Bodhi Tree at Bodh Gaya), ten years after his coronation.
- In the Lumbini (Rumminidei) inscription, he records his visit to the Buddha's birthplace, and declares his reverence for the Buddha and the sangha.
- In the Nigalisagar inscription, he records his doubling in size of a stupa dedicated to a former Buddha, and his visit to the site for worship.
- Some of his inscriptions reflect his interest in maintaining the Buddhist sangha (see #Purification of sangha below).
- The Saru Maru inscription states that Ashoka dispatched the message while travelling to Upunita-vihara in Manema-desha. Although the identity of the destination is not certain, it was obviously a Buddhist monastery (vihara).

Other religions

A legend in the Buddhist text *Vamsatthapakasini* states that an Ajivika ascetic invited to interpret a dream of Ashoka's mother had predicted that he would patronise Buddhism and destroy 96 heretical sects. However, such assertions are directly contradicted by Ashoka's own inscriptions. Ashoka's edicts, such as the Rock Edicts 6, 7, and 12, emphasise

tolerance of all sects. Similarly, in his Rock Edict 12, Ashoka honours people of all faiths. In his inscriptions, Ashoka dedicates caves to non-Buddhist ascetics, and repeatedly states that both Brahmins and shramanas deserved respect. He also tells people "not to denigrate other sects, but to inform themselves about them".

In fact, there is no evidence that Buddhism was a state religion under Ashoka. None of Ashoka's extant edicts record his direct donations to the Buddhists. One inscription records donations by his queen Karuvaki, while the emperor is known to have donated the Barabar Caves to the Ajivikas. There are some indirect references to his donations to Buddhists. For example, the Nigalisagar Pillar inscription records his enlargement of the Konakamana stupa. Similarly, the Lumbini (Rumminidei) inscription states that he exempted the village of Buddha's birth from the land tax, and reduced the revenue tax to one-eighth.

Ashoka appointed the *dhamma-mahamatta* officers, whose duties included the welfare of various religious sects, including the Buddhist sangha, Brahmins, Ajivikas, and Nirgranthas. The Rock Edicts 8 and 12, and the Pillar Edict 7, mandate donations to all religious sects.

Ashoka's Minor Rock Edict 1 contains the phrase "*amissā devā*". According to one interpretation, the term "*amissā*" derives from the word "*am��a*" ("false"), and thus, the phrase is a reference to Ashoak's belief in "true" and "false" gods. However, it is more likely that the term derives from the word "*amiśra*" ("not mingled"), and the phrase refers to celestial beings who did not mingle with humans. The inscription claims

that the righteousness generated by adoption of dhamma by the humans attracted even the celestial gods who did not mingle with humans.

Dharma

Ashoka's various inscriptions suggest that he devoted himself to the propagation of "Dharma" (Pali: Dhamma), a term that refers to the teachings of Gautama Buddha in the Buddhist circles. However, Ashoka's own inscriptions do not mention Buddhist doctrines such as the Four Noble Truths or Nirvana. The word "Dharma" has various connotations in the Indian religions, and can be generally translated as "law, duty, or righteousness". In the Kandahar inscriptions of Ashoka, the word "Dharma" has been translated as eusebeia (Greek) and qsyt (Aramaic), which further suggests that his "Dharma" meant something more generic than Buddhism.

The inscriptions suggest that for Ashoka, Dharma meant "a moral polity of active social concern, religious tolerance, ecological awareness, the observance of common ethical precepts, and the renunciation of war." For example:

- Abolition of the death penalty (Pillar Edict IV)
- Plantation of banyan trees and mango groves, and construction of resthouses and wells, every 800 metres (1⁄2 mile) along the roads. (Pillar Edict 7).
- Restriction on killing of animals in the royal kitchen (Rock Edict 1); the number of animals killed was limited to two peacocks and a deer daily, and in future, even these animals were not to be killed.

- Provision of medical facilities for humans and animals (Rock Edict 2).
- Encouragement of obedience to parents, "generosity toward priests and ascetics, and frugality in spending" (Rock Edict 3).
- He "commissions officers to work for the welfare and happiness of the poor and aged" (Rock Edict 5)
- Promotion of "the welfare of all beings so as to pay off his debt to living creatures and to work for their happiness in this world and the next." (Rock Edict 6)

Modern scholars have variously understood this *dhamma* as a Buddhist lay ethic, a set of politico-moral ideas, a "sort of universal religion", or as an Ashokan innovation. On the other hand, it has also been interpreted as an *essentially political* ideology that sought to knit together a vast and diverse empire.

Ashoka instituted a new category of officers called the *dhamma-mahamattas*, who were tasked with the welfare of the aged, the infrm, the women and children, and various religious sects. They were also sent on diplomatic missions to the Hellenistic kingdoms of west Asia, in order to propagate the dhamma.

Historically, the image of Ashoka in the global Buddhist circles was based on legends (such as those mentioned in the *Ashokavadana*) rather than his rock edicts. This was because the Brahmi script in which these edicts were written was forgotten soon and remained undeciphered until its study by James Prinsep in the 19th century. The writings of the Chinese Buddhist pilgrims such as Faxian and Xuanzang suggest that Ashoka's inscriptions mark the important sites associated with

Gautama Buddha. These writers attribute Buddhism-related content to Ashoka's edicts, but this content does not match with the actual text of the inscriptions as determined by modern scholars after the decipherment of the Brahmi script. It is likely that the script was forgotten by the time of Faxian, who probably relied on local guides; these guides may have made up some Buddhism-related interpretations to gratify him, or may have themselves relied on faulty translations based on oral traditions. Xuanzang may have encountered a similar situation, or may have taken the supposed content of the inscriptions from Faxian's writings. This theory is corroborated by the fact that some Brahmin scholars are known to have similarly come up with a fanciful interpretation of Ashoka pillar inscriptions, when requested to decipher them by the 14th century Muslim king Firuz Shah Tughlaq. According to Shams-i Siraj's *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi*, after the king had these pillar transported from Topra and Mirat to Delhi as war trophies, these Brahmins told him that the inscriptions prophesized that nobody would be able to remove the pillars except a king named Firuz. Moreover, by this time, there were local traditions that attributed the erection of these pillars to the legendary hero Bhima.

According to scholars such as Richard Gombrich, Ashoka's dharma shows Buddhist influence. For example, the Kalinga Separate Edict I seems to be inspired by Buddha's *Advice to Sigala* and his other sermons.

Animal welfare

Ashoka's rock edicts declare that injuring living things is not good, and no animal should be slaughtered for sacrifice. However, he did not prohibit common cattle slaughter or beef eating.

He imposed a ban on killing of "all four-footed creatures that are neither useful nor edible", and of specific animal species including several birds, certain types of fish and bulls among others. He also banned killing of female goats, sheep and pigs that were nursing their young; as well as their young up to the age of six months. He also banned killing of all fish and castration of animals during certain periods such as Chaturmasa and Uposatha.

Ashoka also abolished the royal hunting of animals and restricted the slaying of animals for food in the royal residence. Because he banned hunting, created many veterinary clinics and eliminated meat eating on many holidays, the Mauryan Empire under Ashoka has been described as "one of the very few instances in world history of a government treating its animals as citizens who are as deserving of its protection as the human residents".

Foreign relations

It is well known that Ashoka sent *dütas* or emissaries to convey messages or letters, written or oral (rather both), to various people. The VIth Rock Edict about "oral orders" reveals

this. It was later confirmed that it was not unusual to add oral messages to written ones, and the content of Ashoka's messages can be inferred likewise from the XIIIth Rock Edict: They were meant to spread his *dhammavijaya,* which he considered the highest victory and which he wished to propagate everywhere (including far beyond India). There is obvious and undeniable trace of cultural contact through the adoption of the Kharosthi script, and the idea of installing inscriptions might have travelled with this script, as Achaemenid influence is seen in some of the formulations used by Ashoka in his inscriptions. This indicates to us that Ashoka was indeed in contact with other cultures, and was an active part in mingling and spreading new cultural ideas beyond his own immediate walls.

Hellenistic world

In his rock edicts, Ashoka states that he had encouraged the transmission of Buddhism to the Hellenistic kingdoms to the west and that the Greeks in his dominion were converts to Buddhism and recipients of his envoys:

Now it is conquest by Dhamma that Beloved-of-the-Gods considers to be the best conquest. And it (conquest by Dhamma) has been won here, on the borders, even six hundred yojanas away, where the Greek king Antiochos rules, beyond there where the four kings named Ptolemy, Antigonos, Magas and Alexander rule, likewise in the south among the Cholas, the Pandyas, and as far as Tamraparni. Here in the king's domain among the Greeks, the Kambojas, the Nabhakas, the Nabhapamktis, the Bhojas, the Pitinikas, the Andhras and the Palidas, everywhere people are following Beloved-of-the-Gods'

instructions in Dhamma. Even where Beloved-of-the-Gods' envoys have not been, these people too, having heard of the practice of Dhamma and the ordinances and instructions in Dhamma given by Beloved-of-the-Gods, are following it and will continue to do so.

- *—Edicts of Ashoka, Rock Edict (S. Dhammika)*

It is possible, but not certain, that Ashoka received letters from Greek rulers and was acquainted with the Hellenistic royal orders in the same way as he perhaps knew of the inscriptions of the Achaemenid kings, given the presence of ambassadors of Hellenistic kings in India (as well as the *dütas* sent by Ashoka himself). Dionysius is reported to have been such a Greek ambassador at the court of Ashoka, sent by Ptolemy II Philadelphus, who himself is mentioned in the Edicts of Ashoka as a recipient of the Buddhist proselytism of Ashoka. Some Hellenistic philosophers, such as Hegesias of Cyrene, who probably lived under the rule of King Magas, one of the supposed recipients of Buddhist emissaries from Asoka, are sometimes thought to have been influenced by Buddhist teachings.

The Greeks in India even seem to have played an active role in the propagation of Buddhism, as some of the emissaries of Ashoka, such as Dharmaraksita, are described in Pali sources as leading Greek (Yona) Buddhist monks, active in spreading Buddhism (the *Mahavamsa*, XII).

Some Greeks (Yavana) may have played an administrative role in the territories ruled by Ashoka. The Girnar inscription of Rudradaman records that during the rule of Ashoka, a Yavana

Governor was in charge in the area of Girnar, Gujarat, mentioning his role in the construction of a water reservoir.

It is thought that Ashoka's palace at Patna was modelled after the Achaemenid palace of Persepolis.

Legends about past lives

Buddhist legends mention stories about Ashoka's past lives. According to a *Mahavamsa* story, Ashoka, Nigrodha and Devnampiya Tissa were brothers in a previous life. In that life, a pratyekabuddha was looking for honey to cure another, sick pratyekabuddha. A woman directed him to a honey shop owned by the three brothers. Ashoka generously donated honey to the pratyekabuddha, and wished to become the sovereign ruler of Jambudvipa for this act of merit. The woman wished to become his queen, and was reborn as Ashoka's wife Asandhamitta. Later Pali texts credit her with an additional act of merit: she gifted the pratyekabuddha a piece of cloth made by her. These texts include the *Dasavatthuppakarana*, the so-called Cambodian or Extended *Mahavamsa* (possibly from 9th–10th centuries), and the *Trai Bhumi Katha* (15th century).

According to an *Ashokavadana* story, Ashoka was born as Jaya in a prominent family of Rajagriha. When he was a little boy, he gave the Gautama Buddha dirt imagining it to be food. The Buddha approved of the donation, and Jaya declared that he would become a king by this act of merit. The text also state that Jaya's companion Vijaya was reborn as Ashoka's prime-minister Radhagupta. In the later life, the Buddhist monk Upagupta tells Ashoka that his rough skin was caused by the

impure gift of dirt in the previous life. Some later texts repeat this story, without mentioning the negative implications of gifting dirt; these texts include Kumaralata's *Kalpana-manditika*, Aryashura's *Jataka-mala*, and the *Maha-karma-vibhaga*. The Chinese writer Pao Ch'eng's *Shih chia ju lai ying hua lu* asserts that an insignificant act like gifting dirt could not have been meritorious enough to cause Ashoka's future greatness. Instead, the text claims that in another past life, Ashoka commissioned a large number of Buddha statues as a king, and this act of merit caused him to become a great emperor in the next life.

The 14th century Pali-language fairy tale *Dasavatthuppakarana* (possibly from c. 14th century) combines the stories about the merchant's gift of honey, and the boy's gift of dirt. It narrates a slightly different version of the *Mahavamsa* story, stating that it took place before the birth of the Gautama Buddha. It then states that the merchant was reborn as the boy who gifted dirt to the Buddha; however, in this case, the Buddha his attendant to Ānanda to create plaster from the dirt, which is used repair cracks in the monastery walls.

Legacy

Architecture

Besides the various stupas attributed to Ashoka, the pillars erected by him survive at various places in the Indian subcontinent.

Ashoka is often credited with the beginning of stone architecture in India, possibly following the introduction of stone-building techniques by the Greeks after Alexander the Great. Before Ashoka's time, buildings were probably built in non-permanent material, such as wood, bamboo or thatch. Ashoka may have rebuilt his palace in Pataliputra by replacing wooden material by stone, and may also have used the help of foreign craftmen. Ashoka also innovated by using the permanent qualities of stone for his written edicts, as well as his pillars with Buddhist symbolism.

Symbols

Ashokan capitals were highly realistic and used a characteristic polished finish, Mauryan polish, giving a shiny appearance to the stone surface. Lion Capital of Ashoka, the capital of one of the pillars erected by Ashoka features a carving of a spoked wheel, known as the Ashoka Chakra. This wheel represents the wheel of Dhamma set in motion by the Gautama Buddha, and appears on the flag of modern India. This capital also features sculptures of lions, which appear on the seal of India.

Inscriptions

The edicts of Ashoka are a collection of 33 inscriptions on the Pillars of Ashoka, as well as boulders and cave walls, issued during his reign. These inscriptions are dispersed throughout modern-day Pakistan and India, and represent the first tangible evidence of Buddhism. The edicts describe in detail the first wide expansion of Buddhism through the sponsorship

of one of the most powerful kings of Indian history, offering more information about Ashoka's proselytism, moral precepts, religious precepts, and his notions of social and animal welfare.

Before Ashoka, the royal communications appear to have been written on perishable materials such as palm leaves, birch barks, cotton cloth, and possibly wooden boards. While Ashoka's administration would have continued to use these materials, Ashoka also had his messages inscribed on rock edicts. Ashoka probably got the idea of putting up these inscriptions from the neighbouring Achaemenid empire. It is likely that Ashoka's messages were also inscribed on more perishable materials, such as wood, and sent to various parts of the empire. None of these records survive now.

Scholars are still attempting to analyse both the expressed and implied political ideas of the Edicts (particularly in regard to imperial vision), and make inferences pertaining to how that vision was grappling with problems and political realities of a "virtually subcontinental, and culturally and economically highly variegated, 3rd century BCE Indian empire. Nonetheless, it remains clear that Ashoka's Inscriptions represent the earliest corpus of royal inscriptions in the Indian subcontinent, and therefore prove to be a very important innovation in royal practices."

Most of Ashoka's inscriptions are written in a mixture of various Prakrit dialects, in the Brahmi script.

Several of Ashoka's inscriptions appear to have been set up near towns, on important routes, and at places of religious significance. Many of the inscriptions have been discovered in

hills, rock shelters, and places of local significance. Various theories have been put forward about why Ashoka or his officials chose such places, including that they were centres of megalithic cultures, were regarded as sacred spots in Ashoka's time, or that their physical grandeur may be symbolic of spiritual dominance. Ashoka's inscriptions have not been found at major cities of the Maurya empire, such as Pataliputra, Vidisha, Ujjayini, and Taxila. It is possible that many of these inscriptions are lost; the 7th century Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang refers to some of Ashoka's pillar edicts, which have not been discovered by modern researchers.

It appears that Ashoka dispatched every message to his provincial governors, who in turn, relayed it to various officials in their territory. For example, the Minor Rock Edict 1 appears in several versions at multiple places: all the versions state that Ashoka issued the proclamation while on a tour, having spent 256 days on tour. The number 256 indicates that the message was dispatched simultaneously to various places. Three versions of a message, found at edicts in the neighbouring places in Karnataka (Brahmagiri, Siddapura, and Jatinga-Rameshwara), were sent from the southern province's capital Suvarnagiri to various places. All three versions contain the same message, preceded by an initial greeting from the *arya-putra* (presumably Ashoka's son and the provincial governor) and the *mahamatras* (officials) in Suvarnagiri.

Coinage

- The caduceus appears as a symbol of the punch-marked coins of the Maurya Empire in India, in the 3rd–2nd century BCE. Numismatic research suggests

that this symbol was the symbol of king Ashoka, his personal "Mudra". This symbol was not used on the pre-Mauryan punch-marked coins, but only on coins of the Maurya period, together with the three arched-hill symbol, the "peacock on the hill", the triskelis and the Taxila mark.

Modern scholarship

Rediscovery

Ashoka had almost been forgotten, but in the 19th century James Prinsep contributed in the revelation of historical sources. After deciphering the Brahmi script, Prinsep had originally identified the "Priyadasi" of the inscriptions he found with the King of Ceylon Devanampiya Tissa. However, in 1837, George Turnour discovered an important Sri Lankan manuscript (Dipavamsa, or "Island Chronicle") associating Piyadasi with Ashoka:

"Two hundred and eighteen years after the beatitude of the Buddha, was the inauguration of Piyadassi, ...who, the grandson of Chandragupta, and the son of Bindusara, was at the time Governor of Ujjayani."

- *—Dipavamsa.*

Since then, the association of "Devanampriya Priyadarsin" with Ashoka was confirmed through various inscriptions, and especially confirmed in the Minor Rock Edict inscription

discovered in Maski, directly associating Ashoka with his regnal title Devanampriya ("Beloved-of-the-Gods"):

[A proclamation] of Devanampriya Asoka. Two and a half years [and somewhat more] (have passed) since I am a Buddha-Sakya. [A year and] somewhat more (has passed) [since] I have visited the Samgha and have shown zeal. Those gods who formerly had been unmingled (with men) in Jambudvipa, have how become mingled (with them). This object can be reached even by a lowly (person) who is devoted to morality. One must not think thus, – (viz.) that only an exalted (person) may reach this. Both the lowly and the exalted must be told : "If you act thus, this matter (will be) prosperous and of long duration, and will thus progress to one and a half.

- *—Maski Minor Rock Edict of Ashoka.*

Another important historian was British archaeologist John Hubert Marshall, who was director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India. His main interests were Sanchi and Sarnath, in addition to Harappa and Mohenjodaro. Sir Alexander Cunningham, a British archaeologist and army engineer, and often known as the father of the Archaeological Survey of India, unveiled heritage sites like the Bharhut Stupa, Sarnath, Sanchi, and the Mahabodhi Temple. Mortimer Wheeler, a British archaeologist, also exposed Ashokan historical sources, especially the Taxila.

Perceptions and historiography

The use of Buddhist sources in reconstructing the life of Ashoka has had a strong influence on perceptions of Ashoka,

as well as the interpretations of his Edicts. Building on traditional accounts, early scholars regarded Ashoka as a primarily Buddhist monarch who underwent a conversion to Buddhism and was actively engaged in sponsoring and supporting the Buddhist monastic institution. Some scholars have tended to question this assessment. Romila Thappar writes about Ashoka that "We need to see him both as a statesman in the context of inheriting and sustaining an empire in a particular historical period, and as a person with a strong commitment to changing society through what might be called the propagation of social ethics." The only source of information not attributable to Buddhist sources are the Ashokan Edicts, and these do not explicitly state that Ashoka was a Buddhist. In his edicts, Ashoka expresses support for all the major religions of his time: Buddhism, Brahmanism, Jainism, and Ajivikaism, and his edicts addressed to the population at large (there are some addressed specifically to Buddhists; this is not the case for the other religions) generally focus on moral themes members of all the religions would accept. For example, Amartya Sen writes, "The Indian Emperor Ashoka in the third century BCE presented many political inscriptions in favor of tolerance and individual freedom, both as a part of state policy and in the relation of different people to each other".

However, the edicts alone strongly *indicate* that he was a Buddhist. In one edict he belittles rituals, and he banned Vedic animal sacrifices; these strongly suggest that he at least did not look to the Vedic tradition for guidance. Furthermore, many edicts are expressed to Buddhists alone; in one, Ashoka declares himself to be an "upasaka", and in another he demonstrates a close familiarity with Buddhist texts. He

erected rock pillars at Buddhist holy sites, but did not do so for the sites of other religions. He also used the word "dhamma" to refer to qualities of the heart that underlie moral action; this was an exclusively Buddhist use of the word. However, he used the word more in the spirit than as a strict code of conduct. Romila Thappar writes, "His dhamma did not derive from divine inspiration, even if its observance promised heaven. It was more in keeping with the ethic conditioned by the logic of given situations. His logic of Dhamma was intended to influence the conduct of categories of people, in relation to each other. Especially where they involved unequal relationships." Finally, he promotes ideals that correspond to the first three steps of the Buddha's graduated discourse.

Much of the knowledge about Ashoka comes from the several inscriptions that he had carved on pillars and rocks throughout the empire. All his inscriptions present him as compassionate and loving. In the Kalinga rock edits, he addresses his people as his "children" and mentions that as a father he desires their good.

Impact of pacifism

After Ashoka's death, the Maurya empire declined rapidly. The various Puranas provide different details about Ashoka's successors, but all agree that they had relatively short reigns. The empire seems to have weakened, fragmented, and suffered an invasion from the Bactrian Greeks.

Some historians, such as H. C. Raychaudhuri, have argued that Ashoka's pacifism undermined the "military backbone" of the Maurya empire. Others, such as Romila Thapar, have

suggested that the extent and impact of his pacifism have been "grossly exaggerated".

Chapter 2

Maurya Empire

The **Maurya Empire** was a geographically extensive Iron Age historical power in South Asia based in Magadha, founded by Chandragupta Maurya in 322 BCE, and existing in loose-knit fashion until 185 BCE. The Maurya Empire was centralized by the conquest of the Indo-Gangetic Plain, and its capital city was located at Pataliputra (modern Patna). Outside this imperial center, the empire's geographical extent was dependent on the loyalty of military commanders who controlled the armed cities sprinkling it. During Ashoka's rule (ca. 268–232 BCE) the empire briefly controlled the major urban hubs and arteries of the Indian subcontinent excepting the deep south. It declined for about 50 years after Ashoka's rule, and dissolved in 185 BCE with the assassination of Brihadratha by Pushyamitra Shunga and foundation of the Shunga dynasty in Magadha.

Chandragupta Maurya raised an army, with the assistance of Chanakya, author of Arthasastra, and overthrew the Nanda Empire in c. 322 BCE. Chandragupta rapidly expanded his power westwards across central and western India by conquering the satraps left by Alexander the Great, and by 317 BCE the empire had fully occupied northwestern India. The Mauryan Empire then defeated Seleucus I, a diadochus and founder of the Seleucid Empire, during the Seleucid–Mauryan war, thus acquiring territory west of the Indus River.

Under the Mauryas, internal and external trade, agriculture, and economic activities thrived and expanded across South

Asia due to the creation of a single and efficient system of finance, administration, and security. The Maurya dynasty built a precursor of the Grand Trunk Road from Patliputra to Taxila After the Kalinga War, the Empire experienced nearly half a century of centralized rule under Ashoka. Ashoka's embrace of Buddhism and sponsorship of Buddhist missionaries allowed for the expansion of that faith into Sri Lanka, northwest India, and Central Asia.

The population of South Asia during the Mauryan period has been estimated to be between 15 and 30 million. Among the Indo-Aryan people of the Gangetic plain, who were conquered by the Mauryan Empire, the caste system was consolidated, and the rights of women declined, though "these developments did not affect people living in large parts of the subcontinent."

The empire's period of dominion was marked by exceptional creativity in art, architecture, inscriptions and produced texts. Archaeologically, the period of Mauryan rule in South Asia falls into the era of Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW). The *Arthashastra* and the Edicts of Ashoka are the primary sources of written records of Mauryan times. The Lion Capital of Ashoka at Sarnath is the national emblem of the Republic of India.

Etymology

The name "Maurya" does not occur in Ashoka's inscriptions, or the contemporary Greek accounts such as Megasthenes's *Indica*, but it is attested by the following sources:

- The Junagadh rock inscription of Rudradaman (c. 150 CE) prefixes "Maurya" to the names Chandragupta and Ashoka.
- The Puranas (c. 4th century CE or earlier) use Maurya as a dynastic appellation.
- The Buddhist texts state that Chandragupta belonged to the "Moriya" clan of the Shakyas, the tribe to which Gautama Buddha belonged.
- The Jain texts state that Chandragupta was the son of a royal superintendent of peacocks (*mayura-poshaka*).
- Tamil Sangam literature also designate them as '*moriyar*' and mention them after the Nandas
- Kuntala inscription (from the town of Bandanikke, North Mysore) of 12th century AD chronologically mention Mauryya as one of the dynasties which ruled the region.

According to some scholars, Kharavela's Hathigumpha inscription (2nd-1st century BC) mentions era of Maurya Empire as Muriya Kala (Mauryan era), but this reading is disputed: other scholars—such as epigraphist D. C. Sircar—read the phrase as mukhiya-kala ("the principal art").

According to the Buddhist tradition, the ancestors of the Maurya kings had settled in a region where peacocks (*mora* in Pali) were abundant. Therefore, they came to be known as "Moriyas", literally, "belonging to the place of peacocks". According to another Buddhist account, these ancestors built a city called Moriya-nagara ("Moriya-city"), which was so called, because it was built with the "bricks coloured like peacocks' necks".

The dynasty's connection to the peacocks, as mentioned in the Buddhist and Jain traditions, seems to be corroborated by archaeological evidence. For example, peacock figures are found on the Ashoka pillar at Nandangarh and several sculptures on the Great Stupa of Sanchi. Based on this evidence, modern scholars theorize that the peacock may have been the dynasty's emblem.

Some later authors, such as Dhundiraja (a commentator on the *Mudrarakshasa*) and an annotator of the *Vishnu Purana*, state that the word "Maurya" is derived from Mura and the mother of the first Maurya king. However, the Puranas themselves make no mention of Mura and do not talk of any relation between the Nanda and the Maurya dynasties. Dhundiraja's derivation of the word seems to be his own invention: according to the Sanskrit rules, the derivative of the feminine name Mura (IAST: Murā) would be "Maureya"; the term "Maurya" can only be derived from the masculine "Mura".

History

Founding

Prior to the Maurya Empire, the Nanda Empire ruled over most of the Indian Subcontinent. The Nanda Empire was a large, militaristic, and economically powerful empire due to conquering the Mahajanapadas. According to several legends, Chanakya travelled to Pataliputra, Magadha, the capital of the Nanda Empire where Chanakya worked for the Nandas as a minister. However, Chanakya was insulted by the Emperor Dhana Nanda, of the Nanda dynasty and Chanakya swore

revenge and vowed to destroy the Nanda Empire. He had to flee in order to save his life and went to Taxila, a notable center of learning, to work as a teacher. On one of his travels, Chanakya witnessed some young men playing a rural game practicing a pitched battle. He was impressed by the young Chandragupta and saw royal qualities in him as someone fit to rule.

Meanwhile, Alexander the Great was leading his Indian campaigns and ventured into Punjab. His army mutinied at the Beas River and refused to advance further eastward when confronted by another army. Alexander returned to Babylon and re-deployed most of his troops west of the Indus River. Soon after Alexander died in Babylon in 323 BCE, his empire fragmented into independent kingdoms led by his generals.

The Maurya Empire was established in the Greater Punjab region under the leadership of Chandragupta Maurya and his mentor Chanakya. Chandragupta was taken to Taxila by Chanakya and was tutored about statecraft and governing. Requiring an army Chandragupta recruited and annexed local military republics such as the Yaudheyas that had resisted Alexanders Empire. The Mauryan army quickly rose to become the prominent regional power in the North West of the Indian Subcontinent. The Mauryan army then conquered the satraps established by the Macedonians. Ancient Greek historians Nearchus, Onesictrius and Aristobolus have provided lot of information about the Mauryan empire. The Greek generals Eudemus and Peithon ruled in the Indus Valley until around 317 BCE, when Chandragupta Maurya (with the help of Chanakya, who was now his advisor) fought and drove out the Greek governors, and subsequently brought the Indus Valley under the control of his new seat of power in Magadha.

Chandragupta Maurya's ancestry is shrouded in mystery and controversy. On one hand, a number of ancient Indian accounts, such as the drama *Mudrarakshasa* (*Signet ring of Rakshasa – Rakshasa* was the prime minister of Magadha) by Vishakhadatta, describe his royal ancestry and even link him with the Nanda family. A kshatriya clan known as the Mauryas are referred to in the earliest Buddhist texts, Mahaparinibbana Sutta. However, any conclusions are hard to make without further historical evidence. Chandragupta first emerges in Greek accounts as "Sandrokottos". As a young man he is said to have met Alexander. Chanakya is said to have met the Nanda king, angered him, and made a narrow escape.

Conquest of Magadha

Chanakya encouraged Chandragupta Maurya and his army to take over the throne of Magadha. Using his intelligence network, Chandragupta gathered many young men from across Magadha and other provinces, men upset over the corrupt and oppressive rule of king Dhana Nanda, plus the resources necessary for his army to fight a long series of battles. These men included the former general of Taxila, accomplished students of Chanakya, the representative of King Parvataka, his son Malayaketu, and the rulers of small states. The Macedonians (described as Yona or Yavana in Indian sources) may then have participated, together with other groups, in the armed uprising of Chandragupta Maurya against the Nanda dynasty. The *Mudrarakshasa* of Visakhadutta as well as the Jaina work Parisishtaparvan talk of Chandragupta's alliance with the Himalayan king Parvataka, often identified with Porus, although this identification is not accepted by all historians. This Himalayan alliance gave Chandragupta a

composite and powerful army made up of Yavanas (Greeks), Kambojas, Shakas (Scythians), Kiratas (Himalayans), Parasikas (Persians) and Bahlikas (Bactrians) who took Pataliputra (also called Kusumapura, "The City of Flowers"):

Kusumapura was besieged from every direction by the forces of Parvata and Chandragupta: Shakas, Yavanas, Kiratas, Kambojas, Parasikas, Bahlikas and others, assembled on the advice of Chanakya

- *—In Mudrarakshasa 2*

Preparing to invade Pataliputra, Maurya came up with a strategy. A battle was announced and the Magadhan army was drawn from the city to a distant battlefield to engage with Maurya's forces. Maurya's general and spies meanwhile bribed the corrupt general of Nanda. He also managed to create an atmosphere of civil war in the kingdom, which culminated in the death of the heir to the throne. Chanakya managed to win over popular sentiment. Ultimately Nanda resigned, handing power to Chandragupta, and went into exile and was never heard of again. Chanakya contacted the prime minister, Rakshasas, and made him understand that his loyalty was to Magadha, not to the Nanda dynasty, insisting that he continue in office. Chanakya also reiterated that choosing to resist would start a war that would severely affect Magadha and destroy the city. Rakshasa accepted Chanakya's reasoning, and Chandragupta Maurya was legitimately installed as the new King of Magadha. Rakshasa became Chandragupta's chief advisor, and Chanakya assumed the position of an elder statesman.

Chandragupta Maurya

After the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE, Chandragupta led a series of campaigns in 305 BCE to take satrapies in the Indus Valley and northwest India. When Alexander's remaining forces were routed, returning westwards, Seleucus I Nicator fought to defend these territories. Not many details of the campaigns are known from ancient sources. Seleucus was defeated and retreated into the mountainous region of Afghanistan.

The two rulers concluded a peace treaty in 303 BCE, including a marital alliance. Under its terms, Chandragupta received the satrapies of Paropamisadae (Kamboja and Gandhara) and Arachosia (Kandhahar) and Gedrosia (Balochistan). Seleucus I received the 500 war elephants that were to have a decisive role in his victory against western Hellenistic kings at the Battle of Ipsus in 301 BCE. Diplomatic relations were established and several Greeks, such as the historian Megasthenes, Deimakos and Dionysius resided at the Mauryan court.

Megasthenes in particular was a notable Greek ambassador in the court of Chandragupta Maurya. According to Arrian, ambassador Megasthenes (c. 350 – c. 290 BCE) lived in Arachosia and travelled to Pataliputra. Megasthenes' description of Mauryan society as freedom-loving gave Seleucus a means to avoid invasion, however, underlying Seleucus' decision was the improbability of success. In later years, Seleucus' successors maintained diplomatic relations with the Empire based on similar accounts from returning travellers.

Chandragupta established a strong centralised state with an administration at Pataliputra, which, according to Megasthenes, was "surrounded by a wooden wall pierced by 64 gates and 570 towers". Aelian, although not expressly quoting Megasthenes nor mentioning Pataliputra, described Indian palaces as superior in splendor to Persia's Susa or Ecbatana. The architecture of the city seems to have had many similarities with Persian cities of the period.

Chandragupta's son Bindusara extended the rule of the Mauryan empire towards southern India. The famous Tamil poet Mamulanar of the Sangam literature described how areas south of the Deccan Plateau which comprised Tamil country was invaded by the Maurya army using troops from Karnataka. Mamulanar states that Vadugar (people who resided in Andhra-Karnataka regions immediately to the north of Tamil Nadu) formed the vanguard of the Mauryan army. He also had a Greek ambassador at his court, named Deimachus. According to Plutarch, Chandragupta Maurya subdued all of India, and Justin also observed that Chandragupta Maurya was "in possession of India". These accounts are corroborated by Tamil sangam literature which mentions about Mauryan invasion with their south Indian allies and defeat of their rivals at Podiyil hill in Tirunelveli district in present-day Tamil Nadu.

Chandragupta renounced his throne and followed Jain teacher Bhadrabahu. He is said to have lived as an ascetic at Shravanabelagola for several years before fasting to death, as per the Jain practice of *sallekhana*.

Bindusara

Bindusara was born to Chandragupta, the founder of the Mauryan Empire. This is attested by several sources, including the various Puranas and the *Mahavamsa*. He is attested by the Buddhist texts such as *Dipavamsa* and *Mahavamsa* ("Bindusaro"); the Jain texts such as *Parishishta-Parvan*; as well as the Hindu texts such as *Vishnu Purana* ("Vindusara"). According to the 12th century Jain writer Hemachandra's *Parishishta-Parvan*, the name of Bindusara's mother was Durdhara. Some Greek sources also mention him by the name "Amitrochates" or its variations.

Historian Upinder Singh estimates that Bindusara ascended the throne around 297 BCE. Bindusara, just 22 years old, inherited a large empire that consisted of what is now, Northern, Central and Eastern parts of India along with parts of Afghanistan and Baluchistan. Bindusara extended this empire to the southern part of India, as far as what is now known as Karnataka. He brought sixteen states under the Mauryan Empire and thus conquered almost all of the Indian peninsula (he is said to have conquered the 'land between the two seas' – the peninsular region between the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea). Bindusara did not conquer the friendly Tamil kingdoms of the Cholas, ruled by King Ilamcetcenni, the Pandyas, and Cheras. Apart from these southern states, Kalinga (modern Odisha) was the only kingdom in India that did not form part of Bindusara's empire. It was later conquered by his son Ashoka, who served as the viceroy of Ujjaini during his father's reign, which highlights the importance of the town.

Bindusara's life has not been documented as well as that of his father Chandragupta or of his son Ashoka. Chanakya continued to serve as prime minister during his reign. According to the medieval Tibetan scholar Taranatha who visited India, Chanakya helped Bindusara "to destroy the nobles and kings of the sixteen kingdoms and thus to become absolute master of the territory between the eastern and western oceans". During his rule, the citizens of Taxila revolted twice. The reason for the first revolt was the maladministration of Susima, his eldest son. The reason for the second revolt is unknown, but Bindusara could not suppress it in his lifetime. It was crushed by Ashoka after Bindusara's death.

Bindusara maintained friendly diplomatic relations with the Hellenic world. Deimachus was the ambassador of Seleucid emperor Antiochus I at Bindusara's court. Diodorus states that the king of Palibothra (Pataliputra, the Mauryan capital) welcomed a Greek author, Iambulus. This king is usually identified as Bindusara. Pliny states that the Egyptian king Philadelphus sent an envoy named Dionysius to India. According to Sailendra Nath Sen, this appears to have happened during Bindusara's reign.

Unlike his father Chandragupta (who at a later stage converted to Jainism), Bindusara believed in the Ajivika sect. Bindusara's guru Pingalavatsa (Janasana) was a Brahmin of the Ajivika sect. Bindusara's wife, Queen Subhadrangi (Queen Dharma/ Aggamahesi) was a Brahmin also of the Ajivika sect from Champa (present Bhagalpur district). Bindusara is credited with giving several grants to Brahmin monasteries (*Brahmana-bhatto*).

Historical evidence suggests that Bindusara died in the 270s BCE. According to Upinder Singh, Bindusara died around 273 BCE. Alain Daniélou believes that he died around 274 BCE. Sailendra Nath Sen believes that he died around 273–272 BCE, and that his death was followed by a four-year struggle of succession, after which his son Ashoka became the emperor in 269–268 BCE. According to the *Mahavamsa*, Bindusara reigned for 28 years. The *Vayu Purana*, which names Chandragupta's successor as "Bhadrasara", states that he ruled for 25 years.

Ashoka

As a young prince, Ashoka (r. 272–232 BCE) was a brilliant commander who crushed revolts in Ujjain and Takshashila. As monarch he was ambitious and aggressive, re-asserting the Empire's superiority in southern and western India. But it was his conquest of Kalinga (262–261 BCE) which proved to be the pivotal event of his life. Ashoka used Kalinga to project power over a large region by building a fortification there and securing it as a possession. Although Ashoka's army succeeded in overwhelming Kalinga forces of royal soldiers and civilian units, an estimated 100,000 soldiers and civilians were killed in the furious warfare, including over 10,000 of Ashoka's own men. Hundreds of thousands of people were adversely affected by the destruction and fallout of war. When he personally witnessed the devastation, Ashoka began feeling remorse. Although the annexation of Kalinga was completed, Ashoka embraced the teachings of Buddhism, and renounced war and violence. He sent out missionaries to travel around Asia and spread Buddhism to other countries.

Ashoka implemented principles of *ahimsa* by banning hunting and violent sports activity and ending indentured and forced labor (many thousands of people in war-ravaged Kalinga had been forced into hard labour and servitude). While he maintained a large and powerful army, to keep the peace and maintain authority, Ashoka expanded friendly relations with states across Asia and Europe, and he sponsored Buddhist missions. He undertook a massive public works building campaign across the country. Over 40 years of peace, harmony and prosperity made Ashoka one of the most successful and famous monarchs in Indian history. He remains an idealized figure of inspiration in modern India.

The Edicts of Ashoka, set in stone, are found throughout the Subcontinent. Ranging from as far west as Afghanistan and as far south as Andhra (Nellore District), Ashoka's edicts state his policies and accomplishments. Although predominantly written in Prakrit, two of them were written in Greek, and one in both Greek and Aramaic. Ashoka's edicts refer to the Greeks, Kambojas, and Gandharas as peoples forming a frontier region of his empire. They also attest to Ashoka's having sent envoys to the Greek rulers in the West as far as the Mediterranean. The edicts precisely name each of the rulers of the Hellenic world at the time such as *Amtiyoko* (Antiochus), *Tulamaya* (Ptolemy), *Amtikini* (Antigonos), *Maka* (Magas) and *Alikasudaro* (Alexander) as recipients of Ashoka's proselytism. The Edicts also accurately locate their territory "600 yojanas away" (a yojanas being about 7 miles), corresponding to the distance between the center of India and Greece (roughly 4,000 miles).

Decline

Ashoka was followed for 50 years by a succession of weaker kings. He was succeeded by Dasharatha Maurya, who was Ashoka's grandson. None of Ashoka's sons could ascend the throne after him. Mahendra, his first born, was on to spread Buddhism in the world. Kunala Maurya was blind hence couldn't ascend the throne and Tivala, son of Kaurwaki, died even earlier than Ashoka. Another son, Jalauka, does not have much story behind him.

The empire lost many territories under Dasharatha, which were later reconquered by Samprati, Kunala's son. Post Samprati, the Mauryas slowly lost many territories. In 180 BCE, Brihadratha Maurya, was killed by his general Pushyamitra Shunga in a military parade without any heir. Hence, the great Maurya empire finally ended, giving rise to the Shunga Empire.

Reasons advanced for the decline include the succession of weak kings after Aśoka Maurya, the partition of the empire into two, the growing independence of some areas within the empire, such as that ruled by Sophagasenus, a top-heavy administration where authority was entirely in the hands of a few persons, an absence of any national consciousness, the pure scale of the empire making it unwieldy, and invasion by the Greco-Bactrian Empire.

Some historians, such as H. C. Raychaudhuri, have argued that Ashoka's pacifism undermined the "military backbone" of the Maurya empire. Others, such as Romila Thapar, have suggested that the extent and impact of his pacifism have been "grossly exaggerated".

Shunga coup (185 BCE)

Buddhist records such as the Ashokavadana write that the assassination of Brihadratha and the rise of the Shunga empire led to a wave of religious persecution for Buddhists, and a resurgence of Hinduism. According to Sir John Marshall, Pushyamitra may have been the main author of the persecutions, although later Shunga kings seem to have been more supportive of Buddhism. Other historians, such as Etienne Lamotte and Romila Thapar, among others, have argued that archaeological evidence in favour of the allegations of persecution of Buddhists are lacking, and that the extent and magnitude of the atrocities have been exaggerated.

Establishment of the Indo-Greek Kingdom (180 BCE)

The fall of the Mauryas left the Khyber Pass unguarded, and a wave of foreign invasion followed. The Greco-Bactrian king, Demetrius, capitalized on the break-up, and he conquered southern Afghanistan and parts of northwestern India around 180 BCE, forming the Indo-Greek Kingdom. The Indo-Greeks would maintain holdings on the trans-Indus region, and make forays into central India, for about a century. Under them, Buddhism flourished, and one of their kings, Menander, became a famous figure of Buddhism; he was to establish a new capital of Sagala, the modern city of Sialkot. However, the extent of their domains and the lengths of their rule are subject to much debate. Numismatic evidence indicates that

they retained holdings in the subcontinent right up to the birth of Christ. Although the extent of their successes against indigenous powers such as the Shungas, Satavahanas, and Kalingas are unclear, what is clear is that Scythian tribes, renamed Indo-Scythians, brought about the demise of the Indo-Greeks from around 70 BCE and retained lands in the trans-Indus, the region of Mathura, and Gujarat.

Military

Megasthenes mentions military command consisting of six boards of five members each, (i) Navy (ii) military transport (iii) Infantry (iv) Cavalry with Catapults (v) Chariot divisions and (vi) Elephants.

Administration

The Empire was divided into four provinces, with the imperial capital at Pataliputra. From Ashokan edicts, the names of the four provincial capitals are Tosali (in the east), Ujjain (in the west), Suvarnagiri (in the south), and Taxila (in the north). The head of the provincial administration was the *Kumara* (royal prince), who governed the provinces as king's representative. The *kumara* was assisted by Mahamatyas and council of ministers. This organizational structure was reflected at the imperial level with the Emperor and his *Mantriparishad* (Council of Ministers).. The mauryans established a well developed coin minting system. Coins were mostly made of silver and copper. Certain gold coins were in circulation as well. The coins were widely used for trade and commerce

Historians theorise that the organisation of the Empire was in line with the extensive bureaucracy described by Kautilya in the Arthashastra: a sophisticated civil service governed everything from municipal hygiene to international trade. The expansion and defense of the empire was made possible by what appears to have been one of the largest armies in the world during the Iron Age. According to Megasthenes, the empire wielded a military of 600,000 infantry, 30,000 cavalry, 8,000 chariots and 9,000 war elephants besides followers and attendants. A vast espionage system collected intelligence for both internal and external security purposes. Having renounced offensive warfare and expansionism, Ashoka nevertheless continued to maintain this large army, to protect the Empire and instil stability and peace across West and South Asia..Even though large parts were under the control of Mauryan empire the spread of information and imperial message was limited since many parts were inaccessible and were situated far away from capital of empire.

Local government

Arthashastra and Megasthenes accounts of Pataliputra describe the intricate municipal system formed by Maurya empire to govern its cities. A city counsel made up of thirty commissioners was divided into six committees or boards which governed the city. The first board fixed wages and looked after provided goods, second board made arrangement for foreign dignitaries, tourists and businessmen, third board made records and registrations, fourth looked after manufactured goods and sale of commodities, fifth board regulated trade, issued licenses and checked weights and measurements, sixth board collected sales taxes. Some cities

such as Taxila had autonomy to issue their own coins. The city counsel had officers who looked after public welfare such as maintenance of roads, public buildings, markets, hospitals, educational institutions etc. The official head of the village was Gramika (in towns Nagarika). The city counsel also had some magisterial powers.

Economy

For the first time in South Asia, political unity and military security allowed for a common economic system and enhanced trade and commerce, with increased agricultural productivity. The previous situation involving hundreds of kingdoms, many small armies, powerful regional chieftains, and internecine warfare, gave way to a disciplined central authority. Farmers were freed of tax and crop collection burdens from regional kings, paying instead to a nationally administered and strict-but-fair system of taxation as advised by the principles in the *Arthashastra*. Chandragupta Maurya established a single currency across India, and a network of regional governors and administrators and a civil service provided justice and security for merchants, farmers and traders. The Mauryan army wiped out many gangs of bandits, regional private armies, and powerful chieftains who sought to impose their own supremacy in small areas. Although regimental in revenue collection, Maurya also sponsored many public works and waterways to enhance productivity, while internal trade in India expanded greatly due to new-found political unity and internal peace.

Under the Indo-Greek friendship treaty, and during Ashoka's reign, an international network of trade expanded. The Khyber

Pass, on the modern boundary of Pakistan and Afghanistan, became a strategically important port of trade and intercourse with the outside world. Greek states and Hellenic kingdoms in West Asia became important trade partners of India. Trade also extended through the Malay peninsula into Southeast Asia. India's exports included silk goods and textiles, spices and exotic foods. The external world came across new scientific knowledge and technology with expanding trade with the Mauryan Empire. Ashoka also sponsored the construction of thousands of roads, waterways, canals, hospitals, rest-houses and other public works. The easing of many over-rigorous administrative practices, including those regarding taxation and crop collection, helped increase productivity and economic activity across the Empire.

In many ways, the economic situation in the Mauryan Empire is analogous to the Roman Empire of several centuries later. Both had extensive trade connections and both had organizations similar to corporations. While Rome had organizational entities which were largely used for public state-driven projects, Mauryan India had numerous private commercial entities. These existed purely for private commerce and developed before the Mauryan Empire itself.

Religion

In the early period of empire Brahmanism was an important religion. The Mauryans favored Brahmanism as well as Jainism and Buddhism. Minor religious sects such as ajivikas also received patronage.

Jainism

Chandragupta Maurya followed Jainism after retiring, when he renounced his throne and material possessions to join a wandering group of Jain monks. Chandragupta was a disciple of the Jain monk Acharya Bhadrabahu. It is said that in his last days, he observed the rigorous but self-purifying Jain ritual of santhara (fast unto death), at Shravana Belgola in Karnataka. Samprati, the grandson of Ashoka, also patronized Jainism. Samprati was influenced by the teachings of Jain monks like Suhastin and he is said to have built 125,000 derasars across India. Some of them are still found in the towns of Ahmedabad, Viramgam, Ujjain, and Palitana. It is also said that just like Ashoka, Samprati sent messengers and preachers to Greece, Persia and the Middle East for the spread of Jainism, but, to date, no research has been done in this area.

Thus, Jainism became a vital force under the Mauryan Rule. Chandragupta and Samprati are credited for the spread of Jainism in South India. Hundreds of thousands of temples and stupas are said to have been erected during their reigns

Buddhism

Magadha, the centre of the empire, was also the birthplace of Buddhism. Ashoka initially practised Brahmanism but later followed Buddhism; following the Kalinga War, he renounced expansionism and aggression, and the harsher injunctions of the *Arthashastra* on the use of force, intensive policing, and ruthless measures for tax collection and against rebels. Ashoka

sent a mission led by his son Mahinda and daughter Sanghamitta to Sri Lanka, whose king Tissa was so charmed with Buddhist ideals that he adopted them himself and made Buddhism the state religion. Ashoka sent many Buddhist missions to West Asia, Greece and South East Asia, and commissioned the construction of monasteries and schools, as well as the publication of Buddhist literature across the empire. He is believed to have built as many as 84,000 stupas across India, such as Sanchi and Mahabodhi Temple, and he increased the popularity of Buddhism in Afghanistan, Thailand and North Asia including Siberia. Ashoka helped convene the Third Buddhist Council of India's and South Asia's Buddhist orders near his capital, a council that undertook much work of reform and expansion of the Buddhist religion. Indian merchants embraced Buddhism and played a large role in spreading the religion across the Mauryan Empire.

Society

The population of South Asia during the Mauryan period has been estimated to be between 15 and 30 million. According to Tim Dyson, the period of the Mauryan Empire saw the consolidation of caste among the Indo-Aryan people who had settled in the Gangetic plain, increasingly meeting tribal people who were incorporated into their eveolving caste-system, and the declining rights of women in the Indo-Aryan speaking regions of India, though "these developments did not affect people living in large parts of the subcontinent."

Architectural remains

- The greatest monument of this period, executed in the reign of Chandragupta Maurya, was the old palace at Paliputra, modern Kumhrar in Patna. Excavations have unearthed the remains of the palace, which is thought to have been an group of several buildings, the most important of which was an immense pillared hall supported on a high substratum of timbers. The pillars were set in regular rows, thus dividing the hall into a number of smaller square bays. The number of columns is 80, each about 7 meters high. According to the eyewitness account of Megasthenes, the palace was chiefly constructed of timber, and was considered to exceed in splendour and magnificence the palaces of Susa and Ecbatana, its gilded pillars being adorned with golden vines and silver birds. The buildings stood in an extensive park studded with fish ponds and furnished with a great variety of ornamental trees and shrubs. Kau▯ilya's Arthashastra also gives the method of palace construction from this period. Later fragments of stone pillars, including one nearly complete, with their round tapering shafts and smooth polish, indicate that Ashoka was responsible for the construction of the stone columns which replaced the earlier wooden ones.

During the Ashokan period, stonework was of a highly diversified order and comprised lofty free-standing pillars, railings of stupas, lion thrones and other colossal figures. The

use of stone had reached such great perfection during this time that even small fragments of stone art were given a high lustrous polish resembling fine enamel. This period marked the beginning of the Buddhist school of architecture. Ashoka was responsible for the construction of several stupas, which were large domes and bearing symbols of Buddha. The most important ones are located at Sanchi, Bharhut, Amaravati, Bodhgaya and Nagarjunakonda. The most widespread examples of Mauryan architecture are the Ashoka pillars and carved edicts of Ashoka, often exquisitely decorated, with more than 40 spread throughout the Indian subcontinent.

The peacock was a dynastic symbol of Mauryans, as depicted by Ashoka's pillars at Nandangarh and Sanchi Stupa.

Natural history

The protection of animals in India was advocated by the time of the Maurya dynasty; being the first empire to provide a unified political entity in India, the attitude of the Mauryas towards forests, their denizens, and fauna in general is of interest.

The Mauryas firstly looked at forests as resources. For them, the most important forest product was the elephant. Military might in those times depended not only upon horses and men but also battle-elephants; these played a role in the defeat of Seleucus, one of Alexander's former generals. The Mauryas sought to preserve supplies of elephants since it was cheaper and took less time to catch, tame and train wild elephants than to raise them. Kautilya's *Arthashastra* contains not only maxims on ancient statecraft, but also unambiguously

specifies the responsibilities of officials such as the *Protector of the Elephant Forests*.

On the border of the forest, he should establish a forest for elephants guarded by foresters. The Office of the Chief Elephant Forester should with the help of guards protect the elephants in any terrain. The slaying of an elephant is punishable by death.

- —*Arthashastra*

The Mauryas also designated separate forests to protect supplies of timber, as well as lions and tigers for skins. Elsewhere the *Protector of Animals* also worked to eliminate thieves, tigers and other predators to render the woods safe for grazing cattle.

The Mauryas valued certain forest tracts in strategic or economic terms and instituted curbs and control measures over them. They regarded all forest tribes with distrust and controlled them with bribery and political subjugation. They employed some of them, the food-gatherers or *aranyaca* to guard borders and trap animals. The sometimes tense and conflict-ridden relationship nevertheless enabled the Mauryas to guard their vast empire.

When Ashoka embraced Buddhism in the latter part of his reign, he brought about significant changes in his style of governance, which included providing protection to fauna, and even relinquished the royal hunt. He was the first ruler in history to advocate conservation measures for wildlife and even had rules inscribed in stone edicts. The edicts proclaim that

many followed the king's example in giving up the slaughter of animals; one of them proudly states:

Our king killed very few animals.

- *—Edict on Fifth Pillar*

However, the edicts of Ashoka reflect more the desire of rulers than actual events; the mention of a 100 'panas' (coins) fine for poaching deer in royal hunting preserves shows that rule-breakers did exist. The legal restrictions conflicted with the practices freely exercised by the common people in hunting, felling, fishing and setting fires in forests.

Contacts with the Hellenistic world

Foundation of the Empire

Relations with the Hellenistic world may have started from the very beginning of the Maurya Empire. Plutarch reports that Chandragupta Maurya met with Alexander the Great, probably around Taxila in the northwest:

Sandrocottus, when he was a stripling, saw Alexander himself, and we are told that he often said in later times that Alexander narrowly missed making himself master of the country, since its king was hated and despised on account of his baseness and low birth.

- *—Plutarch 62-4*

Reconquest of the Northwest (c. 317–316 BCE)

Chandragupta ultimately occupied Northwestern India, in the territories formerly ruled by the Greeks, where he fought the satraps (described as "Prefects" in Western sources) left in place after Alexander (Justin), among whom may have been Eudemus, ruler in the western Punjab until his departure in 317 BCE or Peithon, son of Agenor, ruler of the Greek colonies along the Indus until his departure for Babylon in 316 BCE.

India, after the death of Alexander, had assassinated his prefects, as if shaking the burden of servitude. The author of this liberation was Sandracottos, but he had transformed liberation in servitude after victory, since, after taking the throne, he himself oppressed the very people he has liberated from foreign domination.

- *—Justin XV.4.12–13*

Later, as he was preparing war against the prefects of Alexander, a huge wild elephant went to him and took him on his back as if tame, and he became a remarkable fighter and war leader. Having thus acquired royal power, Sandracottos possessed India at the time Seleucos was preparing future glory.

- *—Justin XV.4.19*

Conflict and alliance with Seleucus (305 BCE)

Seleucus I Nicator, the Macedonian satrap of the Asian portion of Alexander's former empire, conquered and put under his own authority eastern territories as far as Bactria and the Indus (Appian, *History of Rome*, The Syrian Wars 55), until in 305 BCE he entered into a confrontation with Emperor Chandragupta:

Always lying in wait for the neighbouring nations, strong in arms and persuasive in council, he [Seleucus] acquired Mesopotamia, Armenia, 'Seleucid' Cappadocia, Persis, Parthia, Bactria, Arabia, Tapouria, Sogdia, Arachosia, Hyrcania, and other adjacent peoples that had been subdued by Alexander, as far as the river Indus, so that the boundaries of his empire were the most extensive in Asia after that of Alexander. The whole region from Phrygia to the Indus was subject to Seleucus.

- *—Appian, History of Rome, "The Syrian Wars" 55*

Though no accounts of the conflict remain, it is clear that Seleucus fared poorly against the Indian Emperor as he failed to conquer any territory, and in fact was forced to surrender much that was already his. Regardless, Seleucus and Chandragupta ultimately reached a settlement and through a treaty sealed in 305 BCE, Seleucus, according to Strabo, ceded a number of territories to Chandragupta, including eastern Afghanistan and Balochistan.

Marriage alliance

Chandragupta and Seleucus concluded a peace treaty and a marriage alliance in 303 BCE. Chandragupta received vast territories and in a return gave Seleucus 500 war elephants, a military asset which would play a decisive role at the Battle of Ipsus in 301 BCE. In addition to this treaty, Seleucus dispatched an ambassador, Megasthenes, to Chandragupta, and later Deimakos to his son Bindusara, at the Mauryan court at Pataliputra (modern Patna in Bihar). Later, Ptolemy II Philadelphus, the ruler of Ptolemaic Egypt and contemporary of Ashoka, is also recorded by Pliny the Elder as having sent an ambassador named Dionysius to the Mauryan court.

Mainstream scholarship asserts that Chandragupta received vast territory west of the Indus, including the Hindu Kush, modern-day Afghanistan, and the Balochistan province of Pakistan. Archaeologically, concrete indications of Mauryan rule, such as the inscriptions of the Edicts of Ashoka, are known as far as Kandahar in southern Afghanistan.

He (Seleucus) crossed the Indus and waged war with Sandrocottus [Maurya], king of the Indians, who dwelt on the banks of that stream, until they came to an understanding with each other and contracted a marriage relationship.

- *—Appian, History of Rome, The Syrian Wars 55*

After having made a treaty with him (Sandrakotos) and put in order the Orient situation, Seleucos went to war against Antigonus.

- *—Junianus Justinus, Historiarum Philippicarum, libri XLIV, XV.4.15*

The treaty on "Epigamia" implies lawful marriage between Greeks and Indians was recognized at the State level, although it is unclear whether it occurred among dynastic rulers or common people, or both.

Exchange of presents

Classical sources have also recorded that following their treaty, Chandragupta and Seleucus exchanged presents, such as when Chandragupta sent various aphrodisiacs to Seleucus:

And Theophrastus says that some contrivances are of wondrous efficacy in such matters [as to make people more amorous]. And Phylarchus confirms him, by reference to some of the presents which Sandrakottus, the king of the Indians, sent to Seleucus; which were to act like charms in producing a wonderful degree of affection, while some, on the contrary, were to banish love.

- *—Athenaeus of Naucratis, The deipnosophists, Book I, chapter 32*

His son Bindusara 'Amitraghata' (Slayer of Enemies) also is recorded in Classical sources as having exchanged presents with Antiochus I:

But dried figs were so very much sought after by all men (for really, as Aristophanes says, "There's really nothing nicer than dried figs"), that even Amitrochates, the king of the Indians,

wrote to Antiochus, entreating him (it is Hegesander who tells this story) to buy and send him some sweet wine, and some dried figs, and a sophist; and that Antiochus wrote to him in answer, "The dry figs and the sweet wine we will send you; but it is not lawful for a sophist to be sold in Greece.

- *—Athenaeus, Deipnosophistae XIV.67*

Greek population in India

An influential and large Greek population was present in the northwest of the Indian subcontinent under Ashoka's rule, possibly remnants of Alexander's conquests in the Indus Valley region. In the Rock Edicts of Ashoka, some of them inscribed in Greek, Ashoka states that the Greeks within his dominion were converted to Buddhism:

Here in the king's dominion among the Greeks, the Kambojas, the Nabhakas, the Nabhapamkits, the Bhojas, the Pitinikas, the Andhras and the Palidas, everywhere people are following Beloved-of-the-Gods' instructions in Dharma.

- *—(Rock Edict Number 13)*

Now, in times past (officers) called Mahamatras of morality did not exist before. Mahdmatras of morality were appointed by me (when I had been) anointed thirteen years. These are occupied with all sects in establishing morality, in promoting morality, and for the welfare and happiness of those who are devoted to morality (even) among the Greeks, Kambojas and Gandharas, and whatever other western borderers (of mine there are).

- *—(Rock Edict Number 5)*

Fragments of Edict 13 have been found in Greek, and a full Edict, written in both Greek and Aramaic, has been discovered in Kandahar. It is said to be written in excellent Classical Greek, using sophisticated philosophical terms. In this Edict, Ashoka uses the word Eusebeia ("Piety") as the Greek translation for the ubiquitous "Dharma" of his other Edicts written in Prakrit:

Ten years (of reign) having been completed, King Piodasses (Ashoka) made known (the doctrine of) Piety (*ε□σέβεια*, Eusebeia) to men; and from this moment he has made men more pious, and everything thrives throughout the whole world. And the king abstains from (killing) living beings, and other men and those who (are) huntsmen and fishermen of the king have desisted from hunting. And if some (were) intemperate, they have ceased from their intemperance as was in their power; and obedient to their father and mother and to the elders, in opposition to the past also in the future, by so acting on every occasion, they will live better and more happily.

- *—Trans. by G.P. Carratelli [1]*

Buddhist missions to the West (c. 250 BCE)

Also, in the Edicts of Ashoka, Ashoka mentions the Hellenistic kings of the period as recipients of his Buddhist proselytism, although no Western historical record of this event remains:

The conquest by Dharma has been won here, on the borders, and even six hundred yojanas (5,400–9,600 km) away, where the Greek king Antiochos rules, beyond there where the four kings named Ptolemy, Antigonos, Magas and Alexander rule, likewise in the south among the Cholas, the Pandyas, and as far as Tamraparni (Sri Lanka).

- *—Edicts of Ashoka, 13th Rock Edict, S. Dhammika.*

Ashoka also encouraged the development of herbal medicine, for men and animals, in their territories:

Everywhere within Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi's [Ashoka's] domain, and among the people beyond the borders, the Cholas, the Pandyas, the Satiyaputras, the Keralaputras, as far as Tamraparni and where the Greek king Antiochos rules, and among the kings who are neighbors of Antiochos, everywhere has Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, made provision for two types of medical treatment: medical treatment for humans and medical treatment for animals. Wherever medical herbs suitable for humans or animals are not available, I have had them imported and grown. Wherever medical roots or fruits are not available I have had them imported and grown. Along roads I have had wells dug and trees planted for the benefit of humans and animals.

- *—2nd Rock Edict*

The Greeks in India even seem to have played an active role in the spread of Buddhism, as some of the emissaries of Ashoka, such as Dharmaraksita, are described in Pali sources as leading Greek ("Yona") Buddhist monks, active in Buddhist proselytism (the Mahavamsa, XII).

Subhagasena and Antiochos III (206 BCE)

Sophagasenus was an Indian Mauryan ruler of the 3rd century BCE, described in ancient Greek sources, and named Subhagasena or Subhashasena in Prakrit. His name is mentioned in the list of Mauryan princes, and also in the list of the Yadava dynasty, as a descendant of Pradyumna. He may have been a grandson of Ashoka, or Kunala, the son of Ashoka. He ruled an area south of the Hindu Kush, possibly in Gandhara. Antiochos III, the Seleucid king, after having made peace with Euthydemus in Bactria, went to India in 206 BCE and is said to have renewed his friendship with the Indian king there:

He (Antiochus) crossed the Caucasus and descended into India; renewed his friendship with Sophagasenus the king of the Indians; received more elephants, until he had a hundred and fifty altogether; and having once more provisioned his troops, set out again personally with his army: leaving Androsthenes of Cyzicus the duty of taking home the treasure which this king had agreed to hand over to him.

- *—Polybius 11.39*

Chapter 3

Kalinga War

The **Kalinga War** (ended c.261 BCE) was fought in ancient India between the Maurya Empire under Ashoka and the state of Kalinga, an independent feudal kingdom located on the east coast, in the present-day state of Odisha and northern parts of Andhra Pradesh. It is presumed that the battle was fought on Dhauli hills in Dhauli which is situated on the banks of Daya River. The Kalinga War included one of the largest and deadliest battles in Indian history. Kalinga did not have a king as it was culturally run without any.

This is the only major war Ashoka fought after his accession to the throne. In fact, this war marks the close of empire building and military conquests of ancient India that began with Maurya king Bindusara. In the entire Indian history this war is considered as the deadliest war costing nearly 250,000 lives.

Background

The reasons for invading Kalinga were to bring peace and for power. Kalinga was a prosperous region consisting of peaceful and artistically skilled people. The northern part of Kalinga was known as the Utkala (Uttar: North, Kal: Kalinga), they were the first from the region to use navy and travelled offshore to the southeast of Asia for trade. For that reason, Kalinga was able to develop several ports and a skilled navy.

The culture of Kalinga was a blend of forest tribal and Brahminism co-existing peacefully.

Kalinga was under the rule of the Nanda Empire who ruled over the region from their capital in Magadha until their fall in 321 BCE. Ashoka's grandfather Chandragupta Maurya had previously attempted to conquer Kalinga but had been repulsed. Ashoka set himself to the task of conquering and annexing Kalinga to the vast Maurya Empire as soon as he securely established himself as the king of Magadha. Some scholars argue that Kalinga was a strategic threat to the Mauryas. It could interrupt communications between Mauryan capital Pataliputra and possessions in the central Indian peninsula. Kalinga also controlled the coastline for the trade-in bay of Bengal.

Course of the war

No war in the history of India as important either for its intensity or for its results as the Kalinga war of Ashoka. No wars in the annals of human history have changed the heart of the victor from one of wanton cruelty to that of exemplary piety as this one. From its fathomless womb, the history of the world may find out only a few wars to its credit which may be equal to this war and not a single one that would be greater than this. The political history of mankind is really a history of wars and no war has ended with so successful a mission of peace for the entire war-torn humanity as the war of Kalinga.

- *—Ramesh Prasad Mohapatra, Military History of Orissa*

The war was completed in the eighth year of Ashoka's reign, according to his own Edicts of Ashoka, probably in 261 BCE. After a bloody battle for the throne following the death of his father, Ashoka was successful in conquering Kalinga – but the consequences of the savagery changed Ashoka's views on war and led him to pledge to never again wage a war of conquest.

According to Megasthenes, the Greek historian at the court of Chandragupta Maurya, the ruler of Kalinga had a powerful army comprising infantry, cavalry and elephants.

Aftermath

Ashoka had seen the bloodshed and felt that he was the cause of the destruction. The whole area of Kalinga was plundered and destroyed. Some of Ashoka's later edicts state that about 150,000 people died on the Kalinga side and an almost equal number of Ashoka's army, though legends among the Odia people – descendants of Kalinga's natives – claim that these figures were highly exaggerated by Ashoka. As per the legends, Kalinga armies caused twice the amount of destruction they suffered. However, prominent historians have rejected this claim and the edicts of Ashoka are believed to be the primary evidence. Thousands of men and women were deported from Kalinga and forced to work on clearing wastelands for future settlement.

Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Priyadarsi, conquered the Kalingas eight years after his coronation. One hundred and fifty thousand were deported, one hundred thousand were killed and many more died (from other causes). After the Kalingas

had been conquered, Beloved-of-the-Gods came to feel a strong inclination towards the Dharma, a love for the Dharma and for instruction in Dharma. Now Beloved-of-the-Gods feels deep remorse for having conquered the Kalingas.

- *—Ashoka, Rock Edict No. 13*

Ashoka's response to the Kalinga War is recorded in the Edicts of Ashoka. The Kalinga War prompted Ashoka, already a non-engaged Buddhist, to devote the rest of his life to ahimsa (non-violence) and to *dharma-Vijaya*(victory through dharma). Following the conquest of Kalinga, Ashoka ended the military expansion of the empire and began an era of more than 40 years of relative peace, harmony, and prosperity.

Chapter 4

Kalinga (Historical Region)

Kalinga is a historical region of India. It is generally defined as the eastern coastal region between the Mahanadi and the Godavari rivers, although its boundaries have fluctuated with the territory of its rulers. The core territory of Kalinga now encompasses a large part of Odisha and northerneastern part of Andhra Pradesh. At its widest extent, the Kalinga region also included parts of present-day southwestern West Bengal and Chhattisgarh.

The Kalingas have been mentioned as a major tribe in the legendary text *Mahabharata*. In the 3rd century BCE, the region came under Mauryan control as a result of the Kalinga War. It was subsequently ruled by several regional dynasties whose rulers bore the title *Kalingadhipati* ("Lord of Kalinga"); these dynasties included Mahameghavahana, Vasishtha, Mathara, Pitrbhakta, Shailodbhava, Somavamshi, and Eastern Ganga. The last major dynasties to rule over Kalinga were the Gajapati dynasty and the Suryavansh dynasty of Nandapur.

Extent

The Kalinga region is generally defined as the eastern coastal region between the Mahanadi and the Godavari rivers. However, its exact boundaries have fluctuated at various times in the history and its widest extent can be interpreted from the word *Tri-Kalinga* (which means 'the whole of Kalinga')

stretching from the river Ganges in the north to the river Godavari in the south.

In the ancient Indian literature, the Kalinga region is associated with the Mahendragiri mountain located in the Ganjam district of Odisha, near its border with Andhra Pradesh.

At times, the southern border of Kalinga extended further up to the Krishna river. In the north, it sometimes extended beyond the Mahandi river, up to the Vaitarani river. The Kalinga region did not encompass the whole of present-day Odisha: the north-eastern part of Odisha was included in the distinct Utkala region. Utkala gradually lost its identity, and came to be considered as a part of Kalinga.

The eastern boundary of Kalinga was formed by the sea (the Bay of Bengal). Its western boundary is difficult to pinpoint, as it varied with the political power of its rulers. However, the Puranic literature suggests that Kalinga extended up to the Amarakantaka hills in the west.

Several ancient inscriptions mention the term "Trikalinga", which has been interpreted in several ways. According to one theory, Trikalinga refers to the widest extent of Kalinga. However, the Eastern Chalukya records suggest that Kalinga and Trikalinga were two distinct regions, with Trikalinga denoting the hilly region to the west of Kalinga.

History

The name of the region is derived from a tribe of the same name. According to the legendary text *Mahabharata*, the progenitors of the Kalingas and of their neighbouring tribes were brothers. These neighbours included the Angas, the Vangas, the Pundras, and the Suhmas.

The Kalingas occupied the extensive territory stretching from river *Baitarani* in Odisha to the *Varahanandi* in the Visakhapatnam district. Its capital in the ancient times was the city of *Dantakura* or Dantapura (now *Dantavaktra* fort near Chicacole in the Srikakulam district, washed by the river *Languliya* or *Langulini*).

The Hathigumpha inscription suggests that a king named Nandaraja had excavated an aqueduct there in the past. Assuming that Nandaraja refers to a king of the Nanda dynasty, it appears that the Kalinga region was annexed by the Nandas at some point. It appears to have become independent again after the fall of the Nandas. It is described as "Calingae" in Megasthenes' *Indica* (3rd century BCE):

The Prinas and the Cainas (a tributary of the Ganges) are both navigable rivers. The tribes which dwell by the Ganges are the Calingae, nearest the sea, and higher up the Mandei, also the Malli, among whom is Mount Mallus, the boundary of all that region being the Ganges.

- *—Megasthenes fragm. XX.B. in Pliny. Hist. Nat. V1. 21.9–22. 1.*

The royal city of the Calingae is called Parthalis. Over their king 60,000 foot-soldiers, 1,000 horsemen, 700 elephants keep watch and ward in "procinct of war."

- *—Megasthenes fragm. LVI. in Plin. Hist. Nat. VI. 21. 8–23. 11.*

Annexation by the Mauryas

Kalinga was annexed by the Mauryan emperor Ashoka in the 3rd century BCE after the Kalinga War. After the final battle near the Dhauli hills, the capital Sisupalgarh fell to the Mauryas. The headquarters of the Mauryan province of Kalinga was located at Tosali. After the decline of the Mauryan Empire, the region came under the control of the Mahameghavahana family, whose king Kharavela described himself as the "supreme Lord of Kalinga".

Kalinga came under Gupta suzerainty in the 4th century CE. After the Gupta withdrawal, it was ruled by several minor dynasties, whose rulers bore the title *Kalingadhipati* ("Lord of Kalinga". These included the Vasishthas, the Matharas, and the Pitrbhaktas.

Eastern Ganga

In the 7th century, the Shailodbhava king Madhavaraja II as well as the Eastern Ganga king Indravarman claimed the title *Sakala-Kalingadhipati* ("the lord of the entire Kalinga").

During the 8th-10th centuries, the Bhauma-Kara dynasty ruled the region, although they called their kingdom "Tosala"

(derived from Tosali, the ancient capital of Kalinga). The subsequent Somavamshi kings called themselves the lord of Kalinga, Kosala, and Utkala.

During the 11th-15th century, the Eastern Gangas became the dominant power in the region, and bore the title *Kalingadhipati*. Their capital was originally located at Kalinganagara (modern Mukhalingam), and was later transferred to Kataka (modern Cuttack) during the reign of Anantavarman Chodaganga in the 12th century.

Influence

Kalinga is also an important part of the legendary history of Sri Lanka, as it was the birthplace of legendary Prince Vijaya according to the *Mahavamsa*.

The merchant Kaundinya I, who became the co-founder of the Funan kingdom(centered in modern Cambodia) after he married the local Nāga princess Soma also has his origins from the ancient Kalinga region.

According to scholar R. C. Majumdar, the 8th century CE Shailendra dynasty of Java likely originated from Kalinga and the dynasty was also powerful in Cambodia and Champa(Annam) region. The Shailendras are considered to have been a thalassocracy and ruled vast swathes of maritime Southeast Asia and the dynasty appeared to be the ruling family of both the Medang Kingdom of Central Java, for some period and the Srivijaya Kingdom in Sumatra.

Burma went by the name of Kalinga-rattha (likely observed in the old Indo-Chinese records for Pegu) and there is evidence of very early merchant settlements and Buddhist missions in the southern Mon regions and by the 2nd century CE, the rule of Kalinga migrants centered around Kale, the Arakan River valley and Pegu, around the Gulf of Martaban. The remains of a ship excavated at Tante, near Yangon is thought to have belonged to Kalingan traders. Place names and similarities in architecture also indicate close contacts across the Gulf of Bengal.

As per Maldivian history, the first kingdom Dheeva Maari was established before 3rd century BC by Soorudasaruna-Adeettiya of the Solar dynasty, an exiled prince and son of King Brahmaadittiya of the Kalinga Kingdom and laid the foundation of the Adeetta dynasty.

In the Philippines according to researcher Eric Casino, the chief (or "king") of Butuan was called as Kiling, is not Visayan in origin but rather Indian, as Kiling is referred to the people of India similar to the word Keling which was used in the nearby Malay regions.

Medieval Era

The last Eastern Ganga ruler Bhanudeva IV was dethroned by Kapilendra Deva in 1435. This event marked the foundation of the Gajapati Empire that ruled over the regions of Utkala (North Odisha) and Kalinga (South Odisha, North Andhra Pradesh). Prataparudra Deva was the last great king of the Suryavamsi Gajapatis and soon after his death his minister Govinda Vidyadhara usurped the throne by murdering the last

two Gajapati scions. The fall of the Gajapati Empire meant the independence of their many tributary and feudal states.

Evidently, a tributary kingdom called Nandapur ruled by the Suryavansh dynasty that arrived in the region in 13th century from Kashmir. The king of this little kingdom was Vishwanath Dev Gajapati who began expanding his kingdom in the southern region of Odisha and northern region of Andhra. In 1545, he sent his military commander and the chief of Kasimkota, Mukund Harichandran to conquer the northern plains of Odisha which were under control of the weak Bhoi dynasty of Govind Vidyadhar.

Govind Vidyadhar signed a truce with Vishwanath Dev and was granted the status of a tributary state. Mukund Harichandran was appointed as the minister in order to seek full control over the region, however, he later assassinated the last two Bhoi heirs and declared himself as the new king of Utkala. Nevertheless, Kalinga was still ruled by the Suryavanshi kings until they were defeated and became a Vassal of the Golconda Qutb Shahi during the reign of Balaram Dev, who failed to control the vast dominion of his predecessor, Vishwanath Gajapati. His successors ruled over the region as 'Maharajah of Kalinga' until the feud of Ramchandra Dev I and Balaram Dev III which marked the end of their domination over Kalinga. They came to be known as Jeypore Samasthanam under the British rule until 1947.

Derived from Kalinga is the still current term Keling or Kling, used in parts of Southeast Asia to denote a person of the Indian subcontinent or Indian diaspora and at present having some derogatory and pejorative connotations, especially in

Malaysia. The 16th-century Portuguese traveller Castanheda wrote of the Keling community in Melaka who lived in the northern part of the city of Malacca(Melaka). The merchants were known as Quelins (Kling, the people of Kalinga from India).

Chapter 5

Buddhism

- **Buddhism** is an Indian religion based on a series of original teachings attributed to Gautama Buddha. It originated in ancient India as a Sramana tradition sometime between the 6th and 4th centuries BCE, spreading through much of Asia. It is the world's fourth-largestreligion with over 520 million followers, or over 7% of the global population, known as **Buddhists**. Buddhism encompasses a variety of traditions, beliefs and spiritual practices largely based on the Buddha's teachings (born Siddhārtha Gautama in the 5th or 4th century BCE) and resulting interpreted philosophies.

As expressed in the Buddha's Four Noble Truths, the goal of Buddhism is to overcome suffering (*duḥkha*) caused by desire and ignorance of reality's true nature, including impermanence (*anicca*) and the non-existence of the self (*anattā*). Most Buddhist traditions emphasize transcending the individual self through the attainment of Nirvana or by following the path of Buddhahood, ending the cycle of death and rebirth. Buddhist schools vary in their interpretation of the path to liberation, the relative importance and canonicity assigned to the various Buddhist texts, and their specific teachings and practices. Widely observed practices include meditation, observance of moral precepts, monasticism, taking refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, and the cultivation of the Paramitas (perfections, or virtues).

Two major extant branches of Buddhism are generally recognized by scholars: Theravāda (Pali: "The School of the Elders") and Mahāyāna (Sanskrit: "The Great Vehicle"). Theravada has a widespread following in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia such as Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Thailand. Mahayana, which includes the traditions of Zen, Pure Land, Nichiren Buddhism, Tiantai Buddhism (Tendai), and Shingon, is practiced prominently in Nepal, Malaysia, Bhutan, China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and Taiwan. Vajrayana, a body of teachings attributed to Indian adepts, may be viewed as a separate branch or as an aspect of Mahayana Buddhism. Tibetan Buddhism, which preserves the Vajrayana teachings of eighth-century India, is practised in the countries of the Himalayan region, Mongolia, and Kalmykia. Historically, until the early 2nd millennium, Buddhism was also widely practised in Afghanistan and Pakistan; it also had a foothold to some extent in other places including the Philippines, the Maldives, and Uzbekistan.

Life of the Buddha

Buddhism is an Indian religion founded on the teachings of Gautama Buddha, a Śramaṇa also called Shakyamuni (sage of the Shakya's), or "the Buddha" ("the Awakened One"), who lived c. 5th to 4th century BCE. Early texts have the Buddha's family name as "Gautama" (Pali: Gotama). The details of Buddha's life are mentioned in many Early Buddhist Texts but are inconsistent. His social background and life details are difficult to prove, and the precise dates are uncertain.

The evidence of the early texts suggests that Siddharta Gautama was born in Lumbini, present-day Nepal and grew up in Kapilavastu, a town in the Ganges Plain, near the modern Nepal–India border, and that he spent his life in what is now modern Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Some hagiographic legends state that his father was a king named Suddhodana, his mother was Queen Maya. However, scholars such as Richard Gombrich consider this a dubious claim because a combination of evidence suggests he was born in the Shakya community, which was governed by a small oligarchy or republic-like council where there were no ranks but where seniority mattered instead. Some of the stories about Buddha, his life, his teachings, and claims about the society he grew up in may have been invented and interpolated at a later time into the Buddhist texts.

According to early texts such as the Pali *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta* ("The discourse on the noble quest," MN 26) and its Chinese parallel at MĀ 204, Gautama was moved by the suffering (*dukkha*) of life and death, and its endless repetition due to rebirth. He thus set out on a quest to find liberation from suffering (also known as "nirvana"). Early texts and biographies state that Gautama first studied under two teachers of meditation, namely Alara Kalama (Sanskrit: Arada Kalama) and Uddaka Ramaputta (Sanskrit: Udraka Ramaputra), learning meditation and philosophy, particularly the meditative attainment of "the sphere of nothingness" from the former, and "the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception" from the latter.

Finding these teachings to be insufficient to attain his goal, he turned to the practice of severe asceticism, which included a

strict fasting regime and various forms of breath control. This too fell short of attaining his goal, and then he turned to the meditative practice of *dhyana*. He famously sat in meditation under a *Ficus religiosa* tree now called the Bodhi Tree in the town of Bodh Gaya and attained "Awakening" (Bodhi).

According to various early texts like the *Mahāsaccaka-sutta,* and the *Samaññaphala Sutta,* on awakening, the Buddha gained insight into the workings of karma and his former lives, as well as achieving the ending of the mental defilements (*asavas*), the ending of suffering, and the end of rebirth in saṃsāra. This event also brought certainty about the Middle Way as the right path of spiritual practice to end suffering. As a fully enlightened Buddha, he attracted followers and founded a *Sangha* (monastic order). He spent the rest of his life teaching the Dharma he had discovered, and then died, achieving "final nirvana," at the age of 80 in Kushinagar, India.

Buddha's teachings were propagated by his followers, which in the last centuries of the 1st millennium BCE became various Buddhist schools of thought, each with its own basket of texts containing different interpretations and authentic teachings of the Buddha; these over time evolved into many traditions of which the more well known and widespread in the modern era are Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism.

Worldview

The term "Buddhism" is an occidental neologism, commonly (and "rather roughly" according to Donald S. Lopez Jr.) used as a translation for the Dharma of the Buddha, *fójiào* in Chinese,

bukkyō in Japanese, *nang pa sangs rgyas pa'i chos* in Tibetan, *buddhadharma* in Sanskrit, *buddhaśāsana* in Pali.

Four Noble Truths – *dukkha* and its ending

The Four Truths express the basic orientation of Buddhism: we crave and cling to impermanent states and things, which is *dukkha*, "incapable of satisfying" and painful. This keeps us caught in saṃsāra, the endless cycle of repeated rebirth, dukkha and dying again. But there is a way to liberation from this endless cycle to the state of nirvana, namely following the Noble Eightfold Path.

The truth of *dukkha* is the basic insight that life in this mundane world, with its clinging and craving to impermanent states and things is *dukkha*, and unsatisfactory. *Dukkha* can be translated as "incapable of satisfying," "the unsatisfactory nature and the general insecurity of all conditioned phenomena"; or "painful." *Dukkha* is most commonly translated as "suffering," but this is inaccurate, since it refers not to episodic suffering, but to the intrinsically unsatisfactory nature of temporary states and things, including pleasant but temporary experiences. We expect happiness from states and things which are impermanent, and therefore cannot attain real happiness.

In Buddhism, dukkha is one of the three marks of existence, along with impermanence and anattā (non-self). Buddhism, like other major Indian religions, asserts that everything is impermanent (anicca), but, unlike them, also asserts that there is no permanent self or soul in living beings (*anattā*). The ignorance or misperception (*avijjā*) that anything is permanent

or that there is self in any being is considered a wrong understanding, and the primary source of clinging and dukkha.

Dukkha arises when we crave (Pali: *ta�hā*) and cling to these changing phenomena. The clinging and craving produces karma, which ties us to samsara, the cycle of death and rebirth. Craving includes *kama-tanha*, craving for sense-pleasures; *bhava-tanha*, craving to continue the cycle of life and death, including rebirth; and *vibhava-tanha*, craving to not experience the world and painful feelings.

Dukkha ceases, or can be confined, when craving and clinging cease or are confined. This also means that no more karma is being produced, and rebirth ends. Cessation is *nirvana*, "blowing out," and peace of mind.

By following the Buddhist path to *moksha*, liberation, one starts to disengage from craving and clinging to impermanent states and things. The term "path" is usually taken to mean the Noble Eightfold Path, but other versions of "the path" can also be found in the Nikayas. The Theravada tradition regards insight into the four truths as liberating in itself.

The cycle of rebirth

Sasāra

Sasāra means "wandering" or "world", with the connotation of cyclic, circuitous change. It refers to the theory of rebirth and "cyclicality of all life, matter, existence", a fundamental

assumption of Buddhism, as with all major Indian religions. Samsara in Buddhism is considered to be *dukkha*, unsatisfactory and painful, perpetuated by desire and *avidya* (ignorance), and the resulting karma.

The theory of rebirths, and realms in which these rebirths can occur, is extensively developed in Buddhism, in particular Tibetan Buddhism with its wheel of existence (*Bhavacakra*) doctrine. Liberation from this cycle of existence, *nirvana*, has been the foundation and the most important historical justification of Buddhism.

The later Buddhist texts assert that rebirth can occur in six realms of existence, namely three good realms (heavenly, demi-god, human) and three evil realms (animal, hungry ghosts, hellish). Samsara ends if a person attains nirvana, the "blowing out" of the desires and the gaining of true insight into impermanence and non-self reality.

Rebirth

Rebirth refers to a process whereby beings go through a succession of lifetimes as one of many possible forms of sentient life, each running from conception to death. In Buddhist thought, this rebirth does not involve any soul, because of its doctrine of anattā (Sanskrit: *anātman*, no-self doctrine) which rejects the concepts of a permanent self or an unchanging, eternal soul, as it is called in Hinduism and Christianity. According to Buddhism there ultimately is no such thing as a self in any being or any essence in any thing.

The Buddhist traditions have traditionally disagreed on what it is in a person that is reborn, as well as how quickly the rebirth occurs after each death. Some Buddhist traditions assert that "no self" doctrine means that there is no perduring self, but there is *avacya* (inexpressible) self which migrates from one life to another. The majority of Buddhist traditions, in contrast, assert that vijñāna (a person's consciousness) though evolving, exists as a continuum and is the mechanistic basis of what undergoes rebirth, rebecoming and redeath. The rebirth depends on the merit or demerit gained by one's karma, as well as that accrued on one's behalf by a family member.

Each rebirth takes place within one of five realms according to Theravadins, or six according to other schools – heavenly, demi-gods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts and hellish.

In East Asian and Tibetan Buddhism, rebirth is not instantaneous, and there is an intermediate state (Tibetan "bardo") between one life and the next. The orthodox Theravada position rejects the wait, and asserts that rebirth of a being is immediate. However there are passages in the *Samyutta Nikaya* of the Pali Canon that seem to lend support to the idea that the Buddha taught about an intermediate stage between one life and the next.

Karma

In Buddhism, karma (from Sanskrit: "action, work") drives *saṃsāra* – the endless cycle of suffering and rebirth for each being. Good, skilful deeds (Pāli: *kusala*) and bad, unskilful deeds (Pāli: *akusala*) produce "seeds" in the unconscious

receptacle (*ālaya*) that mature later either in this life or in a subsequent rebirth. The existence of karma is a core belief in Buddhism, as with all major Indian religions, and it implies neither fatalism nor that everything that happens to a person is caused by karma.

A central aspect of Buddhist theory of karma is that intent (*cetanā*) matters and is essential to bring about a consequence or *phala* "fruit" or vipāka "result". However, good or bad karma accumulates even if there is no physical action, and just having ill or good thoughts creates karmic seeds; thus, actions of body, speech or mind all lead to karmic seeds. In the Buddhist traditions, life aspects affected by the law of karma in past and current births of a being include the form of rebirth, realm of rebirth, social class, character and major circumstances of a lifetime. It operates like the laws of physics, without external intervention, on every being in all six realms of existence including human beings and gods.

A notable aspect of the karma theory in Buddhism is merit transfer. A person accumulates merit not only through intentions and ethical living, but also is able to gain merit from others by exchanging goods and services, such as through *dāna* (charity to monks or nuns). Further, a person can transfer one's own good karma to living family members and ancestors.

Liberation

The cessation of the *kleshas* and the attainment of nirvana (*nibbāna*), with which the cycle of rebirth ends, has been the primary and the soteriological goal of the Buddhist path for

monastic life since the time of the Buddha. The term "path" is usually taken to mean the Noble Eightfold Path, but other versions of "the path" can also be found in the Nikayas. In some passages in the Pali Canon, a distinction is being made between right knowledge or insight (*sammā-ñāṇa*), and right liberation or release (*sammā-vimutti*), as the means to attain cessation and liberation.

Nirvana literally means "blowing out, quenching, becoming extinguished". In early Buddhist texts, it is the state of restraint and self-control that leads to the "blowing out" and the ending of the cycles of sufferings associated with rebirths and redeaths. Many later Buddhist texts describe nirvana as identical with *anatta* with complete "emptiness, nothingness". In some texts, the state is described with greater detail, such as passing through the gate of emptiness (*sunyata*) – realising that there is no soul or self in any living being, then passing through the gate of signlessness (*animitta*) – realising that nirvana cannot be perceived, and finally passing through the gate of wishlessness (*apranihita*) – realising that nirvana is the state of not even wishing for nirvana.

The nirvana state has been described in Buddhist texts partly in a manner similar to other Indian religions, as the state of complete liberation, enlightenment, highest happiness, bliss, fearlessness, freedom, permanence, non-dependent origination, unfathomable, and indescribable. It has also been described in part differently, as a state of spiritual release marked by "emptiness" and realisation of *non-self*.

While Buddhism considers the liberation from saṃsāra as the ultimate spiritual goal, in traditional practice, the primary

focus of a vast majority of lay Buddhists has been to seek and accumulate merit through good deeds, donations to monks and various Buddhist rituals in order to gain better rebirths rather than nirvana.

Dependent arising

Pratityasamutpada, also called "dependent arising, or dependent origination", is the Buddhist theory to explain the nature and relations of being, becoming, existence and ultimate reality. Buddhism asserts that there is nothing independent, except the state of nirvana. All physical and mental states depend on and arise from other pre-existing states, and in turn from them arise other dependent states while they cease.

The 'dependent arisings' have a causal conditioning, and thus *Pratityasamutpada* is the Buddhist belief that causality is the basis of ontology, not a creator God nor the ontological Vedic concept called universal Self (Brahman) nor any other 'transcendent creative principle'. However, Buddhist thought does not understand causality in terms of Newtonian mechanics, rather it understands it as conditioned arising. In Buddhism, dependent arising refers to conditions created by a plurality of causes that necessarily co-originate a phenomenon within and across lifetimes, such as karma in one life creating conditions that lead to rebirth in one of the realms of existence for another lifetime.

Buddhism applies the theory of dependent arising to explain origination of endless cycles of *dukkha* and rebirth, through Twelve Nidānas or "twelve links". It states that because Avidyā

(ignorance) exists Saskāras (karmic formations) exists, because Sa�skāras exists therefore Vijñāna (consciousness) exists, and in a similar manner it links Nāmarūpa (sentient body), �a�āyatana (six senses), Sparśa (sensory stimulation), Vedanā (feeling), Ta�hā (craving), Upādāna (grasping), Bhava (becoming), Jāti (birth), and Jarāmara�a (old age, death, sorrow, pain). By breaking the circuitous links of the Twelve Nidanas, Buddhism asserts that liberation from these endless cycles of rebirth and dukkha can be attained.

Not-Self and Emptiness

A related doctrine in Buddhism is that of *anattā* (Pali) or *anātman* (Sanskrit). It is the view that there is no unchanging, permanent self, soul or essence in phenomena. The Buddha and Buddhist philosophers who follow him such as Vasubandhu and Buddhaghosa, generally argue for this view by analyzing the person through the schema of the five aggregates, and then attempting to show that none of these five components of personality can be permanent or absolute. This can be seen in Buddhist discourses such as the *Anattalakkhana Sutta.*

"Emptiness" or "voidness" (Skt*: Śūnyatā*, Pali: *Suññatā)*, is a related concept with many different interpretations throughout the various Buddhisms. In early Buddhism, it was commonly stated that all five aggregates are void (*rittaka*), hollow (*tucchaka*), coreless (*asāraka*), for example as in the *Pheapiūpama Sutta* (SN 22:95). Similarly, in Theravada Buddhism, it often simply means that the five aggregates are empty of a Self.

Emptiness is a central concept in Mahāyāna Buddhism, especially in Nagarjuna's Madhyamaka school, and in the *Prajñāpāramitā sutras*. In Madhyamaka philosophy, emptiness is the view which holds that all phenomena (*dharmas*) are without any *svabhava* (literally "own-nature" or "self-nature"), and are thus without any underlying essence, and so are "empty" of being independent. This doctrine sought to refute the heterodox theories of *svabhava* circulating at the time.

The Three Jewels

All forms of Buddhism revere and take spiritual refuge in the "three jewels" (*triratna*): Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

Buddha

While all varieties of Buddhism revere "Buddha" and "buddhahood", they have different views on what these are. Whatever that may be, "Buddha" is still central to all forms of Buddhism.

In Theravada Buddhism, a Buddha is someone who has become awake through their own efforts and insight. They have put an end to their cycle of rebirths and have ended all unwholesome mental states which lead to bad action and thus are morally perfected. While subject to the limitations of the human body in certain ways (for example, in the early texts, the Buddha suffers from backaches), a Buddha is said to be "deep, immeasurable, hard-to-fathom as is the great ocean," and also has immense psychic powers (abhijñā).

Theravada generally sees Gautama Buddha (the historical Buddha Sakyamuni) as the only Buddha of the current era. While he is no longer in this world, he has left us the Dharma (Teaching), the Vinaya (Discipline) and the Sangha (Community). There are also said to be two types of Buddhas, a *sammasambuddha* is also said to teach the Dharma to others, while a *paccekabuddha* (solitary buddha) does not teach.

Mahāyāna Buddhism meanwhile, has a vastly expanded cosmology, with various Buddhas and other holy beings (*aryas*) residing in different realms. Mahāyāna texts not only revere numerous Buddhas besides Sakyamuni, such as Amitabha and Vairocana, but also see them as transcendental or supramundane (*lokuttara*) beings. Mahāyāna Buddhism holds that these other Buddhas in other realms can be contacted and are able to benefit beings in this world. In Mahāyāna, a Buddha is a kind of "spiritual king", a "protector of all creatures" with a lifetime that is countless of eons long, rather than just a human teacher who has transcended the world after death. Buddha Sakyamuni's life and death on earth is then usually understood as a "mere appearance" or "a manifestation skilfully projected into earthly life by a long-enlightened transcendent being, who is still available to teach the faithful through visionary experiences."

Dharma

"Dharma" (Pali: Dhamma) in Buddhism refers to the Buddha's teaching, which includes all of the main ideas outlined above. While this teaching reflects the true nature of reality, it is not a belief to be clung to, but a pragmatic teaching to be put into

practice. It is likened to a raft which is "for crossing over" (to nirvana) not for holding on to.

It also refers to the universal law and cosmic order which that teaching both reveals and relies upon. It is an everlasting principle which applies to all beings and worlds. In that sense it is also the ultimate truth and reality about the universe, it is thus "the way that things really are."

The Dharma is the second of the three jewels which all Buddhists take refuge in. All Buddhas in all worlds, in the past, present and in the future, are believed by Buddhists to understand and teach the Dharma. Indeed, it is part of what makes them a Buddha that they do so.

Sangha

The third "jewel" which Buddhists take refuge in is the "Sangha", which refers to the monastic community of monks and nuns who follow Gautama Buddha's monastic discipline which was "designed to shape the Sangha as an ideal community, with the optimum conditions for spiritual growth." The Sangha consists of those who have chosen to follow the Buddha's ideal way of life, which is one of celibate monastic renunciation with minimal material possessions (such as an alms bowl and robes).

The Sangha is seen as important because they preserve and pass down Buddha Dharma. As Gethin states "the Sangha lives the teaching, preserves the teaching as Scriptures and teaches the wider community. Without the Sangha there is no Buddhism."

The Sangha also acts as a "field of merit" for laypersons, allowing them to make spiritual merit or goodness by donating to the Sangha and supporting them. In return, they keep their duty to preserve and spread the Dharma everywhere for the good of the world.

The Sangha is also supposed to follow the Vinaya (monastic rule) of the Buddha, thereby serving as an spiritual example for the world and future generations. The Vinaya rules also force the Sangha to live in dependence on the rest of the lay community (they must beg for food

- etc) and thus draw the Sangha into a relationship with the lay community.There is also a separate definition of Sangha, referring to those who have attained any stage of awakening, whether or not they are monastics. This sangha is called the *āryasaṅgha* "noble Sangha". All forms of Buddhism generally reveres these *āryas* (Pali: *ariya*, "noble ones" or "holy ones") who are spiritually attained beings. Aryas have attained the fruits of the Buddhist path. Becoming an arya is a goal in most forms of Buddhism. The *āryasaṅgha* includes holy beings such as bodhisattvas, arhats and stream-enterers.

In early Buddhism and in Theravada Buddhism, an arhat (literally meaning "worthy") is someone who reached the same awakening (*bodhi*) of a Buddha by following the teaching of a Buddha. They are seen as having ended rebirth and all the mental defilements. A bodhisattva ("a being bound for awakening") meanwhile, is simply a name for someone who is working towards awakening (*bodhi*) as a Buddha. According to

all the early buddhist schools as well as Theravada, to be considered a bodhisattva one has to have made a vow in front of a living Buddha and also has to have received a confirmation of one's future Buddhahood. In Theravada, the future Buddha is called Metteyya (Maitreya) and he is revered as a bodhisatta currently working for future Buddhahood.

Mahāyāna Buddhism generally sees the attainment of the arhat as an inferior one, since it is seen as being done only for the sake of individual liberation. It thus promotes the bodhisattva path as the highest and most worthwhile. While in Mahāyāna, anyone who has given rise to bodhicitta (the wish to become a Buddha that arises from a sense of compassion for all beings) is considered a bodhisattva, some of these holy beings (such as Maitreya and Avalokiteshvara) have reached very high levels of spiritual attainment and are seen as being very powerful supramundane beings who provide aid to countless beings through their advanced powers.

Other key Mahāyāna views

Mahāyāna Buddhism also differs from Theravada and the other schools of early Buddhism in promoting several unique doctrines which are contained in Mahāyāna sutras and philosophical treatises.

One of these is the unique interpretation of emptiness and dependent origination found in the Madhyamaka school. Another very influential doctrine for Mahāyāna is the main philosophical view of the Yogācāra school variously, termed *Vijñaptimātratā-vāda* ("the doctrine that there are only ideas" or "mental impressions") or *Vijñānavāda* ("the doctrine of

consciousness"). According to Mark Siderits, what classical Yogācāra thinkers like Vasubandhu had in mind is that we are only ever aware of mental images or impressions, which may appear as external objects, but "there is actually no such thing outside the mind." There are several interpretations of this main theory, many scholars see it as a type of Idealism, others as a kind of phenomenology.

Another very influential concept unique to Mahāyāna is that of "Buddha-nature" (*buddhadhātu*) or "Tathagata-womb" (*tathāgatagarbha*). Buddha-nature is a concept found in some 1st-millennium CE Buddhist texts, such as the *Tathāgatagarbha sūtras*. According to Paul Williams these Sutras suggest that 'all sentient beings contain a Tathagata' as their 'essence, core inner nature, Self'. According to Karl Brunnholzl "the earliest mahayana sutras that are based on and discuss the notion of tathāgatagarbha as the buddha potential that is innate in all sentient beings began to appear in written form in the late second and early third century." For some, the doctrine seems to conflict with the Buddhist anatta doctrine (non-Self), leading scholars to posit that the *Tathāgatagarbha Sutras* were written to promote Buddhism to non-Buddhists. This can be seen in texts like the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, which state that Buddha-nature is taught to help those who have fear when they listen to the teaching of anatta. Buddhist texts like the *Ratnagotravibhāga* clarify that the "Self" implied in *Tathagatagarbha* doctrine is actually "not-Self". Various interpretations of the concept have been advanced by Buddhist thinkers throughout the history of Buddhist thought and most attempt to avoid anything like the Hindu Atman doctrine.

These Indian Buddhist ideas, in various synthetic ways, form the basis of subsequent Mahāyāna philosophy in Tibetan Buddhism and East Asian Buddhism.

Paths to liberation

While the Noble Eightfold Path is best-known in the West, a wide variety of paths and models of progress have been used and described in the different Buddhist traditions. However, they generally share basic practices such as *sila* (ethics), *samadhi* (meditation, *dhyana*) and *prajña* (wisdom), which are known as the three trainings. An important additional practice is a kind and compassionate attitude toward every living being and the world. Devotion is also important in some Buddhist traditions, and in the Tibetan traditions visualisations of deities and mandalas are important. The value of textual study is regarded differently in the various Buddhist traditions. It is central to Theravada and highly important to Tibetan Buddhism, while the Zen tradition takes an ambiguous stance.

An important guiding principle of Buddhist practice is the Middle Way (*madhyamapratipad*). It was a part of Buddha's first sermon, where he presented the Noble Eightfold Path that was a 'middle way' between the extremes of asceticism and hedonistic sense pleasures. In Buddhism, states Harvey, the doctrine of "dependent arising" (conditioned arising, *pratītyasamutpāda*) to explain rebirth is viewed as the 'middle way' between the doctrines that a being has a "permanent soul" involved in rebirth (eternalism) and "death is final and there is no rebirth" (annihilationism).

Paths to liberation in the early texts

A common presentation style of the path (*mārga*) to liberation in the Early Buddhist Texts is the "graduated talk", in which the Buddha lays out a step by step training.

In the early texts, numerous different sequences of the gradual path can be found. One of the most important and widely used presentations among the various Buddhist schools is The Noble Eightfold Path, or "Eightfold Path of the Noble Ones" (Skt. *'āryā□□ā□gamārga'*). This can be found in various discourses, most famously in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (The discourse on the turning of the Dharma wheel).

Other suttas such as the *Tevijja Sutta*, and the *Cula-Hatthipadopama-sutta* give a different outline of the path, though with many similar elements such as ethics and meditation.

According to Rupert Gethin, the path to awakening is also frequently summarized by another a short formula: "abandoning the hindrances, practice of the four establishings of mindfulness, and development of the awakening factors."

Noble Eightfold Path

The Eightfold Path consists of a set of eight interconnected factors or conditions, that when developed together, lead to the cessation of dukkha. These eight factors are: Right View (or Right Understanding), Right Intention (or Right Thought), Right

Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

This Eightfold Path is the fourth of the Four Noble Truths, and asserts the path to the cessation of *dukkha* (suffering, pain, unsatisfactoriness). The path teaches that the way of the enlightened ones stopped their craving, clinging and karmic accumulations, and thus ended their endless cycles of rebirth and suffering.

Theravada presentations of the path

Theravada Buddhism is a diverse tradition and thus includes different explanations of the path to awakening. However, the teachings of the Buddha are often encapsulated by Theravadins in the basic framework of the Four Noble Truths and the Eighthfold Path.

Some Theravada Buddhists also follow the presentation of the path laid out in Buddhaghosa's Visuddhimagga. This presentation is known as the "Seven Purifications" (*satta-visuddhi*). This schema and its accompanying outline of "insight knowledges" (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*) is used by modern influential Theravadin scholars, such Mahasi Sayadaw (in his "The Progress of Insight") and Nyanatiloka Thera (in "The Buddha's Path to Deliverance").

Mahayana presentations of the path

Mahāyāna Buddhism is based principally upon the path of a Bodhisattva. A *Bodhisattva* refers to one who is on the path to

buddhahood. The term *Mahāyāna* was originally a synonym for *Bodhisattvayāna* or "Bodhisattva Vehicle."

In the earliest texts of Mahāyāna Buddhism, the path of a bodhisattva was to awaken the *bodhicitta*. Between the 1st and 3rd century CE, this tradition introduced the *Ten Bhumi* doctrine, which means ten levels or stages of awakening. This development was followed by the acceptance that it is impossible to achieve Buddhahood in one (current) lifetime, and the best goal is not nirvana for oneself, but Buddhahood after climbing through the ten levels during multiple rebirths. Mahāyāna scholars then outlined an elaborate path, for monks and laypeople, and the path includes the vow to help teach Buddhist knowledge to other beings, so as to help them cross samsara and liberate themselves, once one reaches the Buddhahood in a future rebirth. One part of this path are the *pāramitā* (perfections, to cross over), derived from the *Jatakas* tales of Buddha's numerous rebirths.

The doctrine of the bodhisattva bhūmis was also eventually merged with the Sarvāstivāda Vaibhāṣika schema of the "five paths" by the Yogacara school. This Mahāyāna "five paths" presentation can be seen in Asanga's *Mahāyānasaṃgraha*.

The Mahāyāna texts are inconsistent in their discussion of the *pāramitās*, and some texts include lists of two, others four, six, ten and fifty-two. The six paramitas have been most studied, and these are:

- *Dāna pāramitā*: perfection of giving; primarily to monks, nuns and the Buddhist monastic establishment dependent on the alms and gifts of the

lay householders, in return for generating religious merit; some texts recommend ritually transferring the merit so accumulated for better rebirth to someone else

- *Śīla pāramitā*: perfection of morality; it outlines ethical behaviour for both the laity and the Mahayana monastic community; this list is similar to Śīla in the Eightfold Path (i.e. Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood)
- *Kṣānti pāramitā*: perfection of patience, willingness to endure hardship
- *Vīrya pāramitā*: perfection of vigour; this is similar to Right Effort in the Eightfold Path
- *Dhyāna pāramitā*: perfection of meditation; this is similar to Right Concentration in the Eightfold Path
- *Prajñā pāramitā*: perfection of insight (wisdom), awakening to the characteristics of existence such as karma, rebirths, impermanence, no-self, dependent origination and emptiness; this is complete acceptance of the Buddha teaching, then conviction, followed by ultimate realisation that "dharmas are non-arising".

In Mahāyāna Sutras that include ten *pāramitā*, the additional four perfections are "skillful means, vow, power and knowledge". The most discussed *pāramitā* and the highest rated perfection in Mahayana texts is the "Prajna-paramita", or the "perfection of insight". This insight in the Mahāyāna tradition, states Shōhei Ichimura, has been the "insight of non-duality or the absence of reality in all things".

East Asian Buddhism

East Asian Buddhism in influenced by both the classic Indian Buddhist presentations of the path such as the eighth-fold path as well as classic Indian Mahāyāna presentations such as that found in the Da zhidu lun.

There many different presentations of soteriology, including numerous paths and vehicles (*yanas*) in the different traditions of East Asian Buddhism. There is no single dominant presentation. In Zen Buddhism for example, one can find outlines of the path such as the Two Entrances and Four Practices, The Five ranks, The Ten Ox-Herding Pictures and The Three mysterious Gates of Linji.

Indo-Tibetan Buddhism

In Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, the path to liberation is outlined in the genre known as Lamrim ("Stages of the Path"). All the various Tibetan schools have their own Lamrim presentations. This genre can be traced to Atiśa's 11th-century *A Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* (*Bodhipathapradīpa*).

Common Buddhist practices

Hearing and learning the Dharma

In various suttas which present the graduated path taught by the Buddha, such as the *Samaññaphala Sutta* and the *Cula-*

Hatthipadopama Sutta, the first step on the path is hearing the Buddha teach the Dharma. This then said to lead to the acquiring of confidence or faith in the Buddha's teachings.

Mahayana Buddhist teachers such as Yin Shun also state that hearing the Dharma and study of the Buddhist discourses is necessary "if one wants to learn and practice the Buddha Dharma." Likewise, in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, the "Stages of the Path" (*Lamrim*) texts generally place the activity of listening to the Buddhist teachings as an important early practice.

Refuge

Traditionally, the first step in most Buddhist schools requires taking of the "Three Refuges", also called the Three Jewels (Sanskrit: *triratna*, Pali: *tiratana*) as the foundation of one's religious practice. This practice may have been influenced by the Brahmanical motif of the triple refuge, found in the *Rigveda* 9.97.47, *Rigveda* 6.46.9 and *Chandogya Upanishad* 2.22.3–4. Tibetan Buddhism sometimes adds a fourth refuge, in the *lama*. The three refuges are believed by Buddhists to be protective and a form of reverence.

The ancient formula which is repeated for taking refuge affirms that "I go to the Buddha as refuge, I go to the Dhamma as refuge, I go to the Sangha as refuge." Reciting the three refuges, according to Harvey, is considered not as a place to hide, rather a thought that "purifies, uplifts and strengthens the heart".

Śīla – Buddhist ethics

Śīla (Sanskrit) or *sīla* (Pāli) is the concept of "moral virtues", that is the second group and an integral part of the Noble Eightfold Path. It generally consists of right speech, right action and right livelihood.

One of the most basic forms of ethics in Buddhism is the taking of "precepts". This includes the Five Precepts for laypeople, Eight or Ten Precepts for monastic life, as well as rules of Dhamma (*Vinaya* or *Patimokkha*) adopted by a monastery.

Other important elements of Buddhist ethics include giving or charity (*dāna*), Mettā (Good-Will), Heedfulness (Appamada), 'self-respect' (Hri) and 'regard for consequences' (Apatrapya).

Precepts

Buddhist scriptures explain the five precepts (Pali: *pañcasīla*; Sanskrit: *pañcaśīla*) as the minimal standard of Buddhist morality. It is the most important system of morality in Buddhism, together with the monastic rules.

The five precepts are seen as a basic training applicable to all Buddhists. They are:

- "I undertake the training-precept (*sikkha-padam*) to abstain from onslaught on breathing beings." This includes ordering or causing someone else to kill. The Pali suttas also say one should not "approve of

others killing" and that one should be "scrupulous, compassionate, trembling for the welfare of all living beings."

- "I undertake the training-precept to abstain from taking what is not given." According to Harvey, this also covers fraud, cheating, forgery as well as "falsely denying that one is in debt to someone."
- "I undertake the training-precept to abstain from misconduct concerning sense-pleasures." This generally refers to adultery, as well as rape and incest. It also applies to sex with those who are legally under the protection of a guardian. It is also interpreted in different ways in the varying Buddhist cultures.
- "I undertake the training-precept to abstain from false speech." According to Harvey this includes "any form of lying, deception or exaggeration...even non-verbal deception by gesture or other indication...or misleading statements." The precept is often also seen as including other forms of wrong speech such as "divisive speech, harsh, abusive, angry words, and even idle chatter."
- "I undertake the training-precept to abstain from alcoholic drink or drugs that are an opportunity for heedlessness." According to Harvey, intoxication is seen as a way to mask rather than face the sufferings of life. It is seen as damaging to one's mental clarity, mindfulness and ability to keep the other four precepts.

Undertaking and upholding the five precepts is based on the principle of non-harming (Pāli and Sanskrit: *ahiṃsa*). The Pali

Canon recommends one to compare oneself with others, and on the basis of that, not to hurt others. Compassion and a belief in karmic retribution form the foundation of the precepts. Undertaking the five precepts is part of regular lay devotional practice, both at home and at the local temple. However, the extent to which people keep them differs per region and time. They are sometimes referred to as the *śrāvakayāna precepts* in the Mahāyāna tradition, contrasting them with the *bodhisattva* precepts.

The five precepts are not commandments and transgressions do not invite religious sanctions, but their power has been based on the Buddhist belief in karmic consequences and their impact in the afterlife. Killing in Buddhist belief leads to rebirth in the hell realms, and for a longer time in more severe conditions if the murder victim was a monk. Adultery, similarly, invites a rebirth as prostitute or in hell, depending on whether the partner was unmarried or married. These moral precepts have been voluntarily self-enforced in lay Buddhist culture through the associated belief in karma and rebirth. Within the Buddhist doctrine, the precepts are meant to develop mind and character to make progress on the path to enlightenment.

The monastic life in Buddhism has additional precepts as part of *patimokkha*, and unlike lay people, transgressions by monks do invite sanctions. Full expulsion from *sangha* follows any instance of killing, engaging in sexual intercourse, theft or false claims about one's knowledge. Temporary expulsion follows a lesser offence. The sanctions vary per monastic fraternity (*nikaya*).

Lay people and novices in many Buddhist fraternities also uphold eight (*asta shila*) or ten (*das shila*) from time to time. Four of these are same as for the lay devotee: no killing, no stealing, no lying, and no intoxicants. The other four precepts are:

- No sexual activity;
- Abstain from eating at the wrong time (e.g. only eat solid food before noon);
- Abstain from jewellery, perfume, adornment, entertainment;
- Abstain from sleeping on high bed i.e. to sleep on a mat on the ground.

All eight precepts are sometimes observed by lay people on *uposatha* days: full moon, new moon, the first and last quarter following the lunar calendar. The ten precepts also include to abstain from accepting money.

In addition to these precepts, Buddhist monasteries have hundreds of rules of conduct, which are a part of its *patimokkha.*

Vinaya

Vinaya is the specific code of conduct for a *sangha* of monks or nuns. It includes the Patimokkha, a set of 227 offences including 75 rules of decorum for monks, along with penalties for transgression, in the Theravadin tradition. The precise content of the *Vinaya Pitaka* (scriptures on the Vinaya) differs in different schools and tradition, and different monasteries set their own standards on its implementation. The list of

pattimokkha is recited every fortnight in a ritual gathering of all monks. Buddhist text with vinaya rules for monasteries have been traced in all Buddhist traditions, with the oldest surviving being the ancient Chinese translations.

Monastic communities in the Buddhist tradition cut normal social ties to family and community, and live as "islands unto themselves". Within a monastic fraternity, a *sangha* has its own rules. A monk abides by these institutionalised rules, and living life as the vinaya prescribes it is not merely a means, but very nearly the end in itself. Transgressions by a monk on *Sangha* vinaya rules invites enforcement, which can include temporary or permanent expulsion.

Restraint and renunciation

Another important practice taught by the Buddha is the restraint of the senses (*indriyasamvara*). In the various graduated paths, this is usually presented as a practice which is taught prior to formal sitting meditation, and which supports meditation by weakening sense desires that are a hindrance to meditation. According to Anālayo, sense restraint is when one "guards the sense doors in order to prevent sense impressions from leading to desires and discontent." This is not an avoidance of sense impression, but a kind of mindful attention towards the sense impressions which does not dwell on their main features or signs (*nimitta*). This is said to prevent harmful influences from entering the mind. This practice is said to give rise to an inner peace and happiness which forms a basis for concentration and insight.

A related Buddhist virtue and practice is renunciation, or the intent for desirelessness (*nekkhamma*). Generally, renunciation is the giving up of actions and desires that are seen as unwholesome on the path, such as lust for sensuality and worldly things. Renunciation can be cultivated in different ways. The practice of giving for example, is one form of cultivating renunciation. Another one is the giving up of lay life and becoming a monastic (*bhiksu* o *bhiksuni*). Practicing celibacy (whether for life as a monk, or temporarily) is also a form of renunciation. Many Jataka stories such as the focus on how the Buddha practiced renunciation in past lives.

One way of cultivating renunciation taught by the Buddha is the contemplation (*anupassana*) of the "dangers" (or "negative consequences") of sensual pleasure (*kāmānaṃādīnava*). As part of the graduated discourse, this contemplation is taught after the practice of giving and morality.

Another related practice to renunciation and sense restraint taught by the Buddha is "restraint in eating" or moderation with food, which for monks generally means not eating after noon. Devout laypersons also follow this rule during special days of religious observance (*uposatha*). Observing the Uposatha also includes other practices dealing with renunciation, mainly the eight precepts.

For Buddhist monastics, renunciation can also be trained through several optional ascetic practices called *dhutaṅga*.

In different Buddhist traditions, other related practices which focus on fasting are followed.

Mindfulness and clear comprehension

The training of the faculty called "mindfulness" (Pali: *sati*, Sanskrit: *smṛti,* literally meaning "recollection, remembering") is central in Buddhism. According to Analayo, mindfulness is a full awareness of the present moment which enhances and strengthens memory. The Indian Buddhist philosopher Asanga defined mindfulness thus: "It is non-forgetting by the mind with regard to the object experienced. Its function is non-distraction." According to Rupert Gethin, *sati* is also "an awareness of things in relation to things, and hence an awareness of their relative value."

There are different practices and exercises for training mindfulness in the early discourses, such as the four *Satipaṭṭhānas* (Sanskrit: *smṛtyupasthāna,* "establishments of mindfulness") and *Ānāpānasati* (Sanskrit: *ānāpānasmṛti,* "mindfulness of breathing"*).*

A closely related mental faculty, which is often mentioned side by side with mindfulness, is *sampajañña* ("clear comprehension"). This faculty is the ability to comprehend what one is doing and is happening in the mind, and whether it is being influenced by unwholesome states or wholesome ones.

Meditation – *Samādhi* and *Dhyāna*

A wide range of meditation practices has developed in the Buddhist traditions, but "meditation" primarily refers to the attainment of *samādhi* and the practice of *dhyāna* (Pali: *jhāna*).

Samādhi is a calm, undistracted, unified and concentrated state of consciousness. It is defined by Asanga as "one-pointedness of mind on the object to be investigated. Its function consists of giving a basis to knowledge (*jñāna*)." *Dhyāna* is "state of perfect equanimity and awareness (*upekkhā-sati-parisuddhi*)," reached through focused mental training.

The practice of *dhyāna* aids in maintaining a calm mind, and avoiding disturbance of this calm mind by mindfulness of disturbing thoughts and feelings.

Origins

The earliest evidence of yogis and their meditative tradition, states Karel Werner, is found in the Keśin hymn 10.136 of the Rigveda. While evidence suggests meditation was practised in the centuries preceding the Buddha, the meditative methodologies described in the Buddhist texts are some of the earliest among texts that have survived into the modern era. These methodologies likely incorporate what existed before the Buddha as well as those first developed within Buddhism.

There is no scholarly agreement on the origin and source of the practice of *dhyāna.* Some scholars, like Bronkhorst, see the *four dhyānas* as a Buddhist invention. Alexander Wynne argues that the Buddha learned *dhyāna* from brahmanical teachers.

Whatever the case, the Buddha taught meditation with a new focus and interpretation, particularly through the *four dhyānas* methodology, in which mindfulness is maintained. Further, the

focus of meditation and the underlying theory of liberation guiding the meditation has been different in Buddhism. For example, states Bronkhorst, the verse 4.4.23 of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* with its "become calm, subdued, quiet, patiently enduring, concentrated, one sees soul in oneself" is most probably a meditative state. The Buddhist discussion of meditation is without the concept of soul and the discussion criticises both the ascetic meditation of Jainism and the "real self, soul" meditation of Hinduism.

Four *rupa-jhāna*

Buddhist texts teach various meditation schemas. One of the most prominent is that of the four *rupa-jhānas* (four meditations in the realm of form), which are "stages of progressively deepening concentration". According to Gethin, they are states of "perfect mindfulness, stillness and lucidity." They are described in the Pali Canon as trance-like states without desire. In the early texts, the Buddha is depicted as entering jhāna both before his awakening under the bodhi tree and also before his final nirvana (see: the *Mahāsaccaka-sutta* and the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta*).

The four *rupa-jhānas* are:

- First *jhāna*: the first *dhyana* can be entered when one is secluded from sensuality and unskillful qualities, due to withdrawal and right effort. There is *pīti* ("rapture") and non-sensual *sukha* ("pleasure") as the result of seclusion, while *vitarka-vicara* (thought and examination) continues.

- Second *jhāna*: there is *pīti* ("rapture") and non-sensual *sukha* ("pleasure") as the result of concentration (*samadhi-ji*, "born of samadhi"); *ekaggata* (unification of awareness) free from *vitarka-vicara* ("discursive thought"); *sampasadana* ("inner tranquility").
- Third *jhāna*: *pīti* drops away, there is *upekkhā* (equanimous; "affective detachment"), and one is mindful, alert, and senses pleasure (*sukha*) with the body;
- Fourth *jhāna*: a stage of "pure equanimity and mindfulness" (*upekkhāsatipārisuddhi*), without any pleasure or pain, happiness or sadness.

There is a wide variety of scholarly opinions (both from modern scholars and from traditional Buddhists) on the interpretation of these meditative states as well as varying opinions on how to practice them.

The formless attaiments

Often grouped into the *jhāna*-scheme are four other meditative states, referred to in the early texts as *arupa samāpattis* (formless attainments). These are also referred to in commentarial literature as immaterial/formless *jhānas* (*arūpajhānas*). The first formless attainment is a place or realm of infinite space (*ākāsānañcāyatana*) without form or colour or shape. The second is termed the realm of infinite consciousness (*viññāṇañcāyatana*); the third is the realm of nothingness (*ākiñcaññāyatana*), while the fourth is the realm of "neither perception nor non-perception". The four *rupa-jhānas*

in Buddhist practice lead to rebirth in successfully better *rupa* Brahma heavenly realms, while *arupa-jhānas* lead into arupa heavens.

Meditation and insight

In the Pali canon, the Buddha outlines two meditative qualities which are mutually supportive: *samatha* (Pāli; Sanskrit: *śamatha*; "calm") and *vipassanā* (Sanskrit: *vipaśyanā*, insight). The Buddha compares these mental qualities to a "swift pair of messengers" who together help deliver the message of *nibbana* (SN 35.245).

The various Buddhist traditions generally see Buddhist meditation as being divided into those two main types. Samatha is also called "calming meditation", and focuses on stilling and concentrating the mind i.e. developing samadhi and the four *dhyānas*. According to Damien Keown, *vipassanā* meanwhile, focuses on "the generation of penetrating and critical insight (*paññā*)".

There are numerous doctrinal positions and disagreements within the different Buddhist traditions regarding these qualities or forms of meditation. For example, in the Pali *Four Ways to Arahantship Sutta* (AN 4.170), it is said that one can develop calm and then insight, or insight and then calm, or both at the same time. Meanwhile, in Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośakārikā*, vipaśyanā is said to be practiced once one has reached samadhi by cultivating the four foundations of mindfulness (*sm□tyupasthāna*s).

Beginning with comments by La Vallee Poussin, a series of scholars have argued that these two meditation types reflect a tension between two different ancient Buddhist traditions regarding the use of *dhyāna,* one which focused on insight based practice and the other which focused purely on *dhyāna*. However, other scholars such as Analayo and Rupert Gethin have disagreed with this "two paths" thesis, instead seeing both of these practices as complementary.

The *Brahma-vihara*

The four immeasurables or four abodes, also called *Brahma-viharas*, are virtues or directions for meditation in Buddhist traditions, which helps a person be reborn in the heavenly (Brahma) realm. These are traditionally believed to be a characteristic of the deity Brahma and the heavenly abode he resides in.

The four *Brahma-vihara* are:

- Loving-kindness (Pāli: *mettā*, Sanskrit: *maitrī*) is active good will towards all;
- Compassion (Pāli and Sanskrit: *karuṇā*) results from *metta*; it is identifying the suffering of others as one's own;
- Empathetic joy (Pāli and Sanskrit: *muditā*): is the feeling of joy because others are happy, even if one did not contribute to it; it is a form of sympathetic joy;

- Equanimity (Pāli: *upekkhā*, Sanskrit: *upekṣā*): is even-mindedness and serenity, treating everyone impartially.

According to Peter Harvey, the Buddhist scriptures acknowledge that the four *Brahmavihara* meditation practices "did not originate within the Buddhist tradition". The Brahmavihara (sometimes as Brahmaloka), along with the tradition of meditation and the above four immeasurables are found in pre-Buddha and post-Buddha Vedic and Sramanic literature. Aspects of the Brahmavihara practice for rebirths into the heavenly realm have been an important part of Buddhist meditation tradition.

According to Gombrich, the Buddhist usage of the *brahma-vihāra* originally referred to an awakened state of mind, and a concrete attitude toward other beings which was equal to "living with Brahman" here and now. The later tradition took those descriptions too literally, linking them to cosmology and understanding them as "living with Brahman" by rebirth in the Brahma-world. According to Gombrich, "the Buddha taught that kindness – what Christians tend to call love – was a way to salvation."

Tantra, visualization and the subtle body

Some Buddhist traditions, especially those associated with Tantric Buddhism (also known as Vajrayana and Secret Mantra) use images and symbols of deities and Buddhas in

meditation. This is generally done by mentally visualizing a Buddha image (or some other mental image, like a symbol, a mandala, a syllable, etc.), and using that image to cultivate calm and insight. One may also visualize and identify oneself with the imagined deity. While visualization practices have been particularly popular in Vajrayana, they may also found in Mahayana and Theravada traditions.

In Tibetan Buddhism, unique tantric techniques which include visualization (but also mantra recitation, mandalas, and other elements) are considered to be much more effective than non-tantric meditations and they are one of the most popular meditation methods. The methods of *Unsurpassable Yoga Tantra*, (*anuttarayogatantra*) are in turn seen as the highest and most advanced. Anuttarayoga practice is divided into two stages, the *Generation Stage* and the *Completion Stage.* In the Generation Stage, one meditates on emptiness and visualizes oneself as a deity as well as visualizing its mandala. The focus is on developing clear appearance and divine pride (the understanding that oneself and the deity are one). This method is also known as deity yoga (*devata yoga*). There are numerous meditation deities (*yidam*) used, each with a mandala, a circular symbolic map used in meditation.

In the Completion Stage, one meditates on ultimate reality based on the image that has been generated. Completion Stage practices also include techniques such as *tummo* and *phowa.* These are said to work with subtle body elements, like the energy channels (*nadi*), vital essences (*bindu*), "vital winds" (*vayu*), and chakras. The subtle body energies are seen as influencing consciousness in powerful ways, and are thus used in order to generate the 'great bliss' (*maha-sukha*) which is

used to attain the luminous nature of the mind and realization of the empty and illusory nature of all phenomena ("the illusory body"), which leads to enlightenment.

Completion practices are often grouped into different systems, such as the six dharmas of Naropa, and the six yogas of Kalachakra. In Tibetan Buddhism, there are also practices and methods which are sometimes seen as being outside of the two tantric stages, mainly Mahamudra and Dzogchen (*Atiyoga*).

Practice: monks, laity

According to Peter Harvey, whenever Buddhism has been healthy, not only ordained but also more committed lay people have practised formal meditation. Loud devotional chanting however, adds Harvey, has been the most prevalent Buddhist practice and considered a form of meditation that produces "energy, joy, lovingkindness and calm", purifies mind and benefits the chanter.

Throughout most of Buddhist history, meditation has been primarily practised in Buddhist monastic tradition, and historical evidence suggests that serious meditation by lay people has been an exception. In recent history, sustained meditation has been pursued by a minority of monks in Buddhist monasteries. Western interest in meditation has led to a revival where ancient Buddhist ideas and precepts are adapted to Western mores and interpreted liberally, presenting Buddhism as a meditation-based form of spirituality.

Insight and knowledge

Prajñā (Sanskrit) or *paññā* (Pāli) is wisdom, or knowledge of the true nature of existence. Another term which is associated with *prajñā* and sometimes is equivalent to it is *vipassanā* (Pāli) or *vipaśyanā* (Sanskrit), which is often translated as "insight". In Buddhist texts, the faculty of insight is often said to be cultivated through the four establishments of mindfulness.

In the early texts, *Paññā* is included as one of the "five faculties" (*indriya*) which are commonly listed as important spiritual elements to be cultivated (see for example: AN I 16). *Paññā* along with samadhi, is also listed as one of the "trainings in the higher states of mind" (*adhicittasikkha*).

The Buddhist tradition regards ignorance (*avidyā*), a fundamental ignorance, misunderstanding or mis-perception of the nature of reality, as one of the basic causes of *dukkha* and *samsara.* Overcoming this ignorance is part of the path to awakening. This overcoming includes the contemplation of impermanence and the non-self nature of reality, and this develops dispassion for the objects of clinging, and liberates a being from *dukkha* and *saṃsāra.*

Prajñā is important in all Buddhist traditions. It is variously described as wisdom regarding the impermanent and not-self nature of dharmas (phenomena), the functioning of karma and rebirth, and knowledge of dependent origination. Likewise, *vipaśyanā* is described in a similar way, such as in the *Paṭisambhidāmagga,* where it is said to be the contemplation of things as impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self.

Some scholars such as Bronkhorst and Vetter have argued that the idea that insight leads to liberation was a later development in Buddhism and that there are inconsistencies with the early Buddhist presentation of samadhi and insight. However, others such as Collett Cox and Damien Keown have argued that insight is a key aspect of the early Buddhist process of liberation, which cooperates with samadhi to remove the obstacles to enlightenment (i.e., the āsavas).

In Theravāda Buddhism, the focus of vipassanā meditation is to continuously and thoroughly know how phenomena (*dhammas*) are impermanent (*annica*), not-Self (*anatta*) and *dukkha*. The most widely used method in modern Theravāda for the practice of *vipassanā* is that found in the *Satipatthana Sutta*. There is some disagreement in contemporary Theravāda regarding samatha and vipassanā. Some in the Vipassana Movement strongly emphasize the practice of insight over samatha, and other Theravadins disagree with this.

In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the development of insight (*vipaśyanā*) and tranquility (*śamatha*) are also taught and practiced. The many different schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism have a large repertoire of meditation techniques to cultivate these qualities. These include visualization of various Buddhas, recitation of a Buddha's name, the use of tantric Buddhist mantras and dharanis. Insight in Mahāyāna Buddhism also includes gaining a direct understanding of certain Mahāyāna philosophical views, such as the emptiness view and the consciousness-only view. This can be seen in meditation texts such as Kamalaśīla's *Bhāvanākrama*("Stages of Meditation", 9th century), which teaches insight (*vipaśyanā*) from the Yogācāra-Madhyamaka perspective.

Devotion

According to Harvey, most forms of Buddhism "consider *saddhā* (Skt *śraddhā*), 'trustful confidence' or 'faith', as a quality which must be balanced by wisdom, and as a preparation for, or accompaniment of, meditation." Because of this devotion (Skt. bhakti; Pali: bhatti) is an important part of the practice of most Buddhists. Devotional practices include ritual prayer, prostration, offerings, pilgrimage, and chanting. Buddhist devotion is usually focused on some object, image or location that is seen as holy or spiritually influential. Examples of objects of devotion include paintings or statues of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, stupas, and bodhi trees. Public group chanting for devotional and ceremonial is common to all Buddhist traditions and goes back to ancient India where chanting aided in the memorization of the orally transmitted teachings. Rosaries called malas are used in all Buddhist traditions to count repeated chanting of common formulas or mantras. Chanting is thus a type of devotional group meditation which leads to tranquility and communicates the Buddhist teachings.

In East Asian Pure Land Buddhism, devotion to the Buddha Amitabha is the main practice. In Nichiren Buddhism, devotion to the Lotus Sutra is the main practice. Devotional practices such as pujas have been a common practice in Theravada Buddhism, where offerings and group prayers are made to deities and particularly images of Buddha. According to Karel Werner and other scholars, devotional worship has been a significant practice in Theravada Buddhism, and deep devotion is part of Buddhist traditions starting from the earliest days.

Guru devotion is a central practice of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism. The guru is considered essential and to the Buddhist devotee, the guru is the "enlightened teacher and ritual master" in Vajrayana spiritual pursuits. For someone seeking Buddhahood, the guru is the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, wrote the 12th-century Buddhist scholar Sadhanamala.

The veneration of and obedience to teachers is also important in Theravada and Zen Buddhism.

Vegetarianism and animal ethics

Based on the Indian principle of ahimsa (non-harming), the Buddha's ethics strongly condemn the harming of all sentient beings, including all animals. He thus condemned the animal sacrifice of the brahmins as well hunting, and killing animals for food. This led to various policies by Buddhist kings such as Asoka meant to protect animals, such as the establishing of 'no slaughter days' and the banning of hunting on certain circumstances.

However, early Buddhist texts depict the Buddha as allowing monastics to eat meat. This seems to be because monastics begged for their food and thus were supposed to accept whatever food was offered to them. This was tempered by the rule that meat had to be "three times clean" which meant that "they had not seen, had not heard, and had no reason to suspect that the animal had been killed so that the meat could be given to them". Also, while the Buddha did not explicitly promote vegetarianism in his discourses, he did state that gaining one's livelihood from the meat trade was unethical.

However, this rule was not a promotion of a specific diet, but a rule against the actual killing of animals for food. There was also a famed schism which occurred in the Buddhist community when Devadatta attempted to make vegetarianism compulsory and the Buddha disagreed.

In contrast to this, various Mahayana sutras and texts like the Mahaparinirvana sutra, Surangama sutra and the Lankavatara sutra state that the Buddha promoted vegetarianism out of compassion. Indian Mahayana thinkers like Shantideva promoted the avoidance of meat. Throughout history, the issue of whether Buddhists should be vegetarian has remained a much debated topic and there is a variety of opinions on this issue among modern Buddhists.

In the East Asian Buddhism, most monastics are expected to be vegetarian, and the practice is seen as very virtuous and it is taken up by some devout laypersons. Most Theravadins in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia do not practice vegetarianism and eat whatever is offered by the lay community, who are mostly also not vegetarians. But there are exceptions, some monks choose to be vegetarian and some abbots like Ajahn Sumedho have encouraged the lay community to donate vegetarian food to the monks. Mahasi Sayadaw meanwhile, has recommended vegetarianism as the best way to make sure one's meal is pure in three ways. Also, the new religious movement Santi Asoke, promotes vegetarianism. According to Peter Harvey, in the Theravada world, vegetarianism is "universally admired, but little practiced." Because of the rule against killing, in many Buddhist countries, most butchers and others who work in the meat trade are non-Buddhists.

Likewise, most Tibetan Buddhists have historically tended not to be vegetarian, however, there have been some strong debates and pro-vegetarian arguments by some pro-vegetarian Tibetans. Some influential figures have spoken and written in favor of vegetarianism throughout history, including well known figures like Shabkar and the 17th Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje, who has mandated vegetarianism in all his monasteries.

Buddhist texts

Buddhism, like all Indian religions, was initially an oral tradition in ancient times. The Buddha's words, the early doctrines, concepts, and their traditional interpretations were orally transmitted from one generation to the next. The earliest oral texts were transmitted in Middle Indo-Aryan languages called Prakrits, such as Pali, through the use of communal recitation and other mnemonic techniques.

The first Buddhist canonical texts were likely written down in Sri Lanka, about 400 years after the Buddha died. The texts were part of the *Tripitakas*, and many versions appeared thereafter claiming to be the words of the Buddha. Scholarly Buddhist commentary texts, with named authors, appeared in India, around the 2nd century CE. These texts were written in Pali or Sanskrit, sometimes regional languages, as palm-leaf manuscripts, birch bark, painted scrolls, carved into temple walls, and later on paper.

Unlike what the Bible is to Christianity and the Quran is to Islam, but like all major ancient Indian religions, there is no

consensus among the different Buddhist traditions as to what constitutes the scriptures or a common canon in Buddhism. The general belief among Buddhists is that the canonical corpus is vast. This corpus includes the ancient *Sutras* organised into *Nikayas* or *Agamas*, itself the part of three basket of texts called the *Tripitakas*. Each Buddhist tradition has its own collection of texts, much of which is translation of ancient Pali and Sanskrit Buddhist texts of India. The Chinese Buddhist canon, for example, includes 2184 texts in 55 volumes, while the Tibetan canon comprises 1108 texts – all claimed to have been spoken by the Buddha – and another 3461 texts composed by Indian scholars revered in the Tibetan tradition. The Buddhist textual history is vast; over 40,000 manuscripts – mostly Buddhist, some non-Buddhist – were discovered in 1900 in the Dunhuang Chinese cave alone.

Early Buddhist texts

- The Early Buddhist Texts refers to the literature which is considered by modern scholars to be the earliest Buddhist material. The first four Pali Nikayas, and the corresponding Chinese Āgamas are generally considered to be among the earliest material. Apart from these, there are also fragmentary collections of EBT materials in other languages such as Sanskrit, Khotanese, Tibetan and Gāndhārī. The modern study of early Buddhism often relies on comparative scholarship using these various early Buddhist sources to identify parallel texts and common doctrinal content. One feature of

these early texts are literary structures which reflect oral transmission, such as widespread repetition.

The Tripitakas

After the development of the different early Buddhist schools, these schools began to develop their own textual collections, which were termed *Tripiṭakas* (Triple Baskets).

Many early *Tripiṭakas*, like the Pāli *Tipitaka*, were divided into three sections: *Vinaya Pitaka* (focuses on monastic rule), *Sutta Pitaka* (Buddhist discourses) and *Abhidhamma Pitaka,* which contain expositions and commentaries on the doctrine.

The Pāli *Tipitaka* (also known as the Pali Canon) of the Theravada School constitutes the only complete collection of Buddhist texts in an Indic language which has survived until today. However, many *Sutras*, *Vinayas* and *Abhidharma* works from other schools survive in Chinese translation, as part of the Chinese Buddhist Canon. According to some sources, some early schools of Buddhism had five or seven *pitakas*.

Much of the material in the Pali Canon is not specifically "Theravadin", but is instead the collection of teachings that this school preserved from the early, non-sectarian body of teachings. According to Peter Harvey, it contains material at odds with later Theravadin orthodoxy. He states: "The Theravadins, then, may have *added* texts to the Canon for some time, but they do not appear to have tampered with what they already had from an earlier period."

Abhidharma and the commentaries

A distinctive feature of many Tripitaka collections is the inclusion of a genre called Abhidharma, which dates from the 3rd century BCE and later. According to Collett Cox, the genre began as explanations and elaborations of the teachings in the suttas but over time evolved into an independent system of doctrinal exposition.

Over time, the various Abhidharma traditions developed various disagreements which each other on points of doctrine, which were discussed in the different Abhidharma texts of these schools. The major Abhidharma collections which modern scholars have the most information about are those of the Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda schools.

In Sri Lanka and South India, the Theravāda Abhidhamma system was the most influential. In addition to the Abhidharma project, some of the schools also began accumulating a literary tradition of scriptural commentary on their respective Tripitakas. These commentaries were particularly important in the Theravāda school, and the Pali commentaries (*Aṭṭhakathā*) remain influential today. Both Abhidhamma and the Pali commentaries influenced the *Visuddhimagga,* an important 5th-century text by the Theravada scholar Buddhaghosa, who also translated and compiled many of the *Aṭṭhakathās* from older Sinhalese sources.

The Sarvāstivāda school was one of the most influential Abhidharma traditions in North India. The magnum opus of this tradition was the massive Abhidharma commentary called the *Mahāvibhaṣa* ('Great Commentary'), compiled at a great

synod in Kashmir during the reign of Kanishka II (c. 158–176). The *Abhidharmakosha* of Vasubandhu is another very influential Abhidharma work from the northern tradition, which continues to be studied in East Asian Buddhism and in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism.

Mahāyāna texts

The Mahāyāna sūtras are a very broad genre of Buddhist scriptures that the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition holds are original teachings of the Buddha. Modern historians generally hold that the first of these texts were composed probably around the 1st century BCE or 1st century CE.

In Mahāyāna, these texts are generally given greater authority than the early Āgamas and Abhidharma literature, which are called "Śrāvakayāna" or "Hinayana" to distinguish them from Mahāyāna sūtras. Mahāyāna traditions mainly see these different classes of texts as being designed for different types of persons, with different levels of spiritual understanding. The Mahāyāna sūtras are mainly seen as being for those of "greater" capacity.

The Mahāyāna sūtras often claim to articulate the Buddha's deeper, more advanced doctrines, reserved for those who follow the bodhisattva path. That path is explained as being built upon the motivation to liberate all living beings from unhappiness. Hence the name *Mahāyāna* (lit., *the Great Vehicle*). Besides the teaching of the bodhisattva, Mahāyāna texts also contain expanded cosmologies and mythologies, with many more Buddhas and powerful bodhisattvas, as well as new spiritual practices and ideas.

The modern Theravada school does not treat the Mahāyāna sūtras as authoritative or authentic teachings of the Buddha. Likewise, these texts were not recognized as authoritative by many early Buddhist schools and in some cases, communities such as the Mahāsāṃghika school split up due to this disagreement.

Recent scholarship has discovered many early Mahāyāna texts which shed light into the development of Mahāyāna. Among these is the *Śālistamba Sutra* which survives in Tibetan and Chinese translation. This text contains numerous sections which are remarkably similar to Pali suttas. The *Śālistamba Sutra* was cited by Mahāyāna scholars such as the 8th-century Yasomitra to be authoritative. This suggests that Buddhist literature of different traditions shared a common core of Buddhist texts in the early centuries of its history, until Mahāyāna literature diverged about and after the 1st century CE.

Mahāyāna also has a very large literature of philosophical and exegetical texts. These are often called *śāstra* (treatises) or *vrittis* (commentaries). Some of this literature was also written in verse form (*karikās*), the most famous of which is the *Mūlamadhyamika-karikā* (Root Verses on the Middle Way) by Nagarjuna, the foundational text of the Madhyamika school.

Tantric texts

During the Gupta Empire, a new class of Buddhist sacred literature began to develop, which are called the Tantras. By the 8th century, the tantric tradition was very influential in

India and beyond. Besides drawing on a Mahāyāna Buddhist framework, these texts also borrowed deities and material from other Indian religious traditions, such as the Śaiva and Pancharatra traditions, local god/goddess cults, and local spirit worship (such as yaksha or nāga spirits).

Some features of these texts include the widespread use of mantras, meditation on the subtle body, worship of fierce deities, and antinomian and transgressive practices such as ingesting alcohol and performing sexual rituals.

History

Historical roots

Historically, the roots of Buddhism lie in the religious thought of Iron Age India around the middle of the first millennium BCE. This was a period of great intellectual ferment and socio-cultural change known as the "Second urbanisation", marked by the growth of towns and trade, the composition of the Upanishads and the historical emergence of the Śramaṇa traditions.

New ideas developed both in the Vedic tradition in the form of the Upanishads, and outside of the Vedic tradition through the Śramaṇa movements. The term Śramaṇa refers to several Indian religious movements parallel to but separate from the historical Vedic religion, including Buddhism, Jainism and others such as Ājīvika.

Several Śramaṇa movements are known to have existed in India before the 6th century BCE (pre-Buddha, pre-Mahavira), and these influenced both the āstika and nāstika traditions of Indian philosophy. According to Martin Wilshire, the Śramaṇa tradition evolved in India over two phases, namely Paccekabuddha and Savaka phases, the former being the tradition of individual ascetic and the latter of disciples, and that Buddhism and Jainism ultimately emerged from these. Brahmanical and non-Brahmanical ascetic groups shared and used several similar ideas, but the Śramaṇa traditions also drew upon already established Brahmanical concepts and philosophical roots, states Wiltshire, to formulate their own doctrines. Brahmanical motifs can be found in the oldest Buddhist texts, using them to introduce and explain Buddhist ideas. For example, prior to Buddhist developments, the Brahmanical tradition internalised and variously reinterpreted the three Vedic sacrificial fires as concepts such as Truth, Rite, Tranquility or Restraint. Buddhist texts also refer to the three Vedic sacrificial fires, reinterpreting and explaining them as ethical conduct.

The Śramaṇa religions challenged and broke with the Brahmanic tradition on core assumptions such as Atman (soul, self), Brahman, the nature of afterlife, and they rejected the authority of the Vedas and Upanishads. Buddhism was one among several Indian religions that did so.

Indian Buddhism

The history of Indian Buddhism may be divided into five periods: Early Buddhism (occasionally called pre-sectarian Buddhism), Nikaya Buddhism or Sectarian Buddhism: The

period of the early Buddhist schools, Early Mahayana Buddhism, Late Mahayana, and the era of Vajrayana or the "Tantric Age".

Pre-sectarian Buddhism

According to Lambert Schmithausen Pre-sectarian Buddhism is "the canonical period prior to the development of different schools with their different positions."

The early Buddhist Texts include the four principal Pali Nikāyas (and their parallel Agamas found in the Chinese canon) together with the main body of monastic rules, which survive in the various versions of the patimokkha. However, these texts were revised over time, and it is unclear what constitutes the earliest layer of Buddhist teachings. One method to obtain information on the oldest core of Buddhism is to compare the oldest extant versions of the Theravadin Pāli Canon and other texts. The reliability of the early sources, and the possibility to draw out a core of oldest teachings, is a matter of dispute. According to Vetter, inconsistencies remain, and other methods must be applied to resolve those inconsistencies.

According to Schmithausen, three positions held by scholars of Buddhism can be distinguished:

- "Stress on the fundamental homogeneity and substantial authenticity of at least a considerable part of the Nikayic materials;"
- "Scepticism with regard to the possibility of retrieving the doctrine of earliest Buddhism;"

- "Cautious optimism in this respect."

The Core teachings

According to Mitchell, certain basic teachings appear in many places throughout the early texts, which has led most scholars to conclude that Gautama Buddha must have taught something similar to the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, Nirvana, the three marks of existence, the five aggregates, dependent origination, karma and rebirth.

According to N. Ross Reat, all of these doctrines are shared by the Theravada Pali texts and the Mahasamghika school's*Śālistamba Sūtra*. A recent study by Bhikkhu Analayo concludes that the Theravada *Majjhima Nikaya* and Sarvastivada *Madhyama Agama* contain mostly the same major doctrines. Richard Salomon, in his study of the Gandharan texts (which are the earliest manuscripts containing early discourses), has confirmed that their teachings are "consistent with non-Mahayana Buddhism, which survives today in the Theravada school of Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, but which in ancient times was represented by eighteen separate schools."

However, some scholars argue that critical analysis reveals discrepancies among the various doctrines found in these early texts, which point to alternative possibilities for early Buddhism. The authenticity of certain teachings and doctrines have been questioned. For example, some scholars think that karma was not central to the teaching of the historical Buddha, while other disagree with this position. Likewise, there is scholarly disagreement on whether insight was seen as liberating in early Buddhism or whether it was a later addition

to the practice of the four *jhānas*. Scholars such as Bronkhorst also think that the four noble truths may not have been formulated in earliest Buddhism, and did not serve in earliest Buddhism as a description of "liberating insight". According to Vetter, the description of the Buddhist path may initially have been as simple as the term "the middle way". In time, this short description was elaborated, resulting in the description of the eightfold path.

Ashokan Era and the early schools

According to numerous Buddhist scriptures, soon after the *parinirvāṇa* (from Sanskrit: "highest extinguishment") of Gautama Buddha, the first Buddhist council was held to collectively recite the teachings to ensure that no errors occurred in oral transmission. Many modern scholars question the historicity of this event. However, Richard Gombrich states that the monastic assembly recitations of the Buddha's teaching likely began during Buddha's lifetime, and they served a similar role of codifying the teachings.

The so called Second Buddhist council resulted in the first schism in the Sangha. Modern scholars believe that this was probably caused when a group of reformists called Sthaviras ("elders") sought to modify the Vinaya (monastic rule), and this caused a split with the conservatives who rejected this change, they were called Mahāsāṃghikas. While most scholars accept that this happened at some point, there is no agreement on the dating, especially if it dates to before or after the reign of Ashoka.

Buddhism may have spread only slowly throughout India until the time of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka (304–232 BCE), who was a public supporter of the religion. The support of Aśoka and his descendants led to the construction of more stūpas (such as at Sanchi and Bharhut), temples (such as the Mahabodhi Temple) and to its spread throughout the Maurya Empire and into neighbouring lands such as Central Asia and to the island of Sri Lanka.

During and after the Mauryan period (322–180 BCE), the Sthavira community gave rise to several schools, one of which was the Theravada school which tended to congregate in the south and another which was the Sarvāstivāda school, which was mainly in north India. Likewise, the Mahāsāṅghika groups also eventually split into different Sanghas. Originally, these schisms were caused by disputes over monastic disciplinary codes of various fraternities, but eventually, by about 100 CE if not earlier, schisms were being caused by doctrinal disagreements too.

Following (or leading up to) the schisms, each Saṅgha started to accumulate their own version of Tripiṭaka (triple basket of texts). In their Tripiṭaka, each school included the Suttas of the Buddha, a Vinaya basket (disciplinary code) and some schools also added an Abhidharma basket which were texts on detailed scholastic classification, summary and interpretation of the Suttas. The doctrine details in the Abhidharmas of various Buddhist schools differ significantly, and these were composed starting about the third century BCE and through the 1st millennium CE.

Post-Ashokan expansion

- According to the edicts of Aśoka, the Mauryan emperor sent emissaries to various countries west of India to spread "Dharma", particularly in eastern provinces of the neighbouring Seleucid Empire, and even farther to Hellenistic kingdoms of the Mediterranean. It is a matter of disagreement among scholars whether or not these emissaries were accompanied by Buddhist missionaries.

In central and west Asia, Buddhist influence grew, through Greek-speaking Buddhist monarchs and ancient Asian trade routes, a phenomenon known as Greco-Buddhism. An example of this is evidenced in Chinese and Pali Buddhist records, such as *Milindapanha* and the Greco-Buddhist art of Gandhāra. The *Milindapanha* describes a conversation between a Buddhist monk and the 2nd-century BCE Greek king Menander, after which Menander abdicates and himself goes into monastic life in the pursuit of nirvana. Some scholars have questioned the *Milindapanha* version, expressing doubts whether Menander was Buddhist or just favourably disposed to Buddhist monks.

The Kushan empire (30–375 CE) came to control the Silk Road trade through Central and South Asia, which brought them to interact with Gandharan Buddhism and the Buddhist institutions of these regions. The Kushans patronised Buddhism throughout their lands, and many Buddhist centers were built or renovated (the Sarvastivada school was particularly favored), especially by Emperor Kanishka (128–151 CE). Kushan support helped Buddhism to expand into a world religion through their trade routes. Buddhism spread to

Khotan, the Tarim Basin, and China, eventually to other parts of the far east. Some of the earliest written documents of the Buddhist faith are the Gandharan Buddhist texts, dating from about the 1st century CE, and connected to the Dharmaguptaka school.

The Islamic conquest of the Iranian Plateau in the 7th-century, followed by the Muslim conquests of Afghanistan and the later establishment of the Ghaznavid kingdom with Islam as the state religion in Central Asia between the 10th- and 12th-century led to the decline and disappearance of Buddhism from most of these regions.

Mahāyāna Buddhism

The origins of Mahāyāna ("Great Vehicle") Buddhism are not well understood and there are various competing theories about how and where this movement arose. Theories include the idea that it began as various groups venerating certain texts or that it arose as a strict forest ascetic movement.

The first Mahāyāna works were written sometime between the 1st century BCE and the 2nd century CE. Much of the early extant evidence for the origins of Mahāyāna comes from early Chinese translations of Mahāyāna texts, mainly those of Lokakṣema. (2nd century CE). Some scholars have traditionally considered the earliest Mahāyāna sūtras to include the first versions of the Prajnaparamita series, along with texts concerning Akṣobhya, which were probably composed in the 1st century BCE in the south of India.

There is no evidence that Mahāyāna ever referred to a separate formal school or sect of Buddhism, with a separate monastic code (Vinaya), but rather that it existed as a certain set of ideals, and later doctrines, for bodhisattvas. Records written by Chinese monks visiting India indicate that both Mahāyāna and non-Mahāyāna monks could be found in the same monasteries, with the difference that Mahāyāna monks worshipped figures of Bodhisattvas, while non-Mahayana monks did not.

Mahāyāna initially seems to have remained a small minority movement that was in tension with other Buddhist groups, struggling for wider acceptance. However, during the fifth and sixth centuries CE, there seems to have been a rapid growth of Mahāyāna Buddhism, which is shown by a large increase in epigraphic and manuscript evidence in this period. However, it still remained a minority in comparison to other Buddhist schools.

Mahāyāna Buddhist institutions continued to grow in influence during the following centuries, with large monastic university complexes such as Nalanda (established by the 5th-century CE Gupta emperor, Kumaragupta I) and Vikramashila (established under Dharmapala c. 783 to 820) becoming quite powerful and influential. During this period of Late Mahāyāna, four major types of thought developed: Mādhyamaka, Yogācāra, Buddha-nature (*Tathāgatagarbha*), and the epistemological tradition of Dignaga and Dharmakirti. According to Dan Lusthaus, Mādhyamaka and Yogācāra have a great deal in common, and the commonality stems from early Buddhism.

Late Indian Buddhism and Tantra

During the Gupta period (4th–6th centuries) and the empire of Harṣavardana (c. 590–647 CE), Buddhism continued to be influential in India, and large Buddhist learning institutions such as Nalanda and Valabahi Universities were at their peak. Buddhism also flourished under the support of the Pāla Empire (8th–12th centuries). Under the Guptas and Palas, Tantric Buddhism or Vajrayana developed and rose to prominence. It promoted new practices such as the use of mantras, dharanis, mudras, mandalas and the visualization of deities and Buddhas and developed a new class of literature, the Buddhist Tantras. This new esoteric form of Buddhism can be traced back to groups of wandering yogi magicians called mahasiddhas.

The question of the origins of early Vajrayana has been taken up by various scholars. David Seyfort Ruegg has suggested that Buddhist tantra employed various elements of a "pan-Indian religious substrate" which is not specifically Buddhist, Shaiva or Vaishnava.

According to Indologist Alexis Sanderson, various classes of Vajrayana literature developed as a result of royal courts sponsoring both Buddhism and Saivism. Sanderson has argued that Buddhist tantras can be shown to have borrowed practices, terms, rituals and more form Shaiva tantras. He argues that Buddhist texts even directly copied various Shaiva tantras, especially the Bhairava Vidyapitha tantras. Ronald M. Davidson meanwhile, argues that Sanderson's claims for direct influence from Shaiva *Vidyapitha* texts are problematic because "the chronology of the *Vidyapitha* tantras is by no

means so well established" and that the Shaiva tradition also appropriated non-Hindu deities, texts and traditions. Thus while "there can be no question that the Buddhist tantras were heavily influenced by Kapalika and other Saiva movements" argues Davidson, "the influence was apparently mutual."

Already during this later era, Buddhism was losing state support in other regions of India, including the lands of the Karkotas, the Pratiharas, the Rashtrakutas, the Pandyas and the Pallavas. This loss of support in favor of Hindu faiths like Vaishnavism and Shaivism, is the beginning of the long and complex period of the Decline of Buddhism in the Indian subcontinent. The Islamic invasions and conquest of India (10th to 12th century), further damaged and destroyed many Buddhist institutions, leading to its eventual near disappearance from India by the 1200s.

Spread to East and Southeast Asia

The Silk Road transmission of Buddhism to China is most commonly thought to have started in the late 2nd or the 1st century CE, though the literary sources are all open to question. The first documented translation efforts by foreign Buddhist monks in China were in the 2nd century CE, probably as a consequence of the expansion of the Kushan Empire into the Chinese territory of the Tarim Basin.

The first documented Buddhist texts translated into Chinese are those of the Parthian An Shigao (148–180 CE). The first known Mahāyāna scriptural texts are translations into Chinese by the Kushan monk Lokakṣema in Luoyang, between 178 and 189 CE. From China, Buddhism was introduced into its

neighbours Korea (4th century), Japan (6th–7th centuries), and Vietnam (c. 1st–2nd centuries).

During the Chinese Tang dynasty (618–907), Chinese Esoteric Buddhism was introduced from India and Chan Buddhism (Zen) became a major religion. Chan continued to grow in the Song dynasty (960–1279) and it was during this era that it strongly influenced Korean Buddhism and Japanese Buddhism. Pure Land Buddhism also became popular during this period and was often practised together with Chan. It was also during the Song that the entire Chinese canon was printed using over 130,000 wooden printing blocks.

During the Indian period of Esoteric Buddhism (from the 8th century onwards), Buddhism spread from India to Tibet and Mongolia. Johannes Bronkhorst states that the esoteric form was attractive because it allowed both a secluded monastic community as well as the social rites and rituals important to laypersons and to kings for the maintenance of a political state during succession and wars to resist invasion. During the MiddleAges, Buddhism slowly declined in India, while it vanished from Persia and Central Asia as Islam became the state religion.

The Theravada school arrived in Sri Lanka sometime in the 3rd century BCE. Sri Lanka became a base for its later spread to Southeast Asia after the 5th century CE (Myanmar, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia and coastal Vietnam). Theravada Buddhism was the dominant religion in Burma during the Mon Hanthawaddy Kingdom (1287–1552). It also became dominant in the Khmer Empire during the 13th and

14th centuries and in the Thai Sukhothai Kingdom during the reign of Ram Khamhaeng (1237/1247–1298).

Schools and traditions

- Buddhists generally classify themselves as either Theravāda or Mahāyāna. This classification is also used by some scholars and is the one ordinarily used in the English language. An alternative scheme used by some scholars divides Buddhism into the following three traditions or geographical or cultural areas: Theravāda (or "Southern Buddhism", "South Asian Buddhism"), East Asian Buddhism (or just "Eastern Buddhism") and Indo-Tibetan Buddhism (or "Northern Buddhism").

Some scholars use other schemes. Buddhists themselves have a variety of other schemes. Hinayana (literally "lesser or inferior vehicle") is sometimes used by Mahāyāna followers to name the family of early philosophical schools and traditions from which contemporary Theravāda emerged, but as the Hinayana term is considered derogatory, a variety of other terms are used instead, including: Śrāvakayāna, Nikaya Buddhism, early Buddhist schools, sectarian Buddhism and conservative Buddhism.

Not all traditions of Buddhism share the same philosophical outlook, or treat the same concepts as central. Each tradition, however, does have its own core concepts, and some comparisons can be drawn between them:

- Both Theravāda and Mahāyāna accept and revere the Buddha Sakyamuni as the founder, Mahāyāna also reveres numerous other Buddhas, such as Amitabha or Vairocana as well as many other bodhisattvas not revered in Theravāda.
- Both accept the Middle Way, Dependent origination, the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, the Three Jewels, the Three marks of existence and the *Bodhipakṣadharmas* (aids to awakening).
- Mahāyāna focuses mainly on the bodhisattva path to Buddhahood which it sees as universal and to be practiced by all persons, while Theravāda does not focus on teaching this path and teaches the attainment of arhatship as a worthy goal to strive towards. The bodhisattva path is not denied in Theravāda, it is generally seen as a long and difficult path suitable for only a few. Thus the Bodhisattva path is normative in Mahāyāna, while it is an optional path for a heroic few in Theravāda.
- Mahāyāna sees the arhat's nirvana as being imperfect and inferior or preliminary to full Buddhahood. It sees arhatship as selfish, since bodhisattvas vow to save all beings while arhats save only themselves. Theravāda meanwhile does not accept that the arhat's nirvana is an inferior or preliminary attainment, nor that it is a selfish deed to attain arhatship since not only are arhats described as compassionate but they have destroyed the root of greed, the sense of "I am".
- Mahāyāna accepts the authority of the many Mahāyāna sutras along with the other Nikaya texts like the Agamas and the Pali canon (though it sees

Mahāyāna texts as primary), while Theravāda does not accept that the Mahāyāna sutras are *buddhavacana* (word of the Buddha) at all.

Theravāda school

The Theravāda tradition bases itself on the Pāli Canon, considers itself to be the more orthodox form of Buddhism and tends to be more conservative in doctrine and monastic discipline. The Pāli Canon is the only complete Buddhist canon surviving in an ancient Indian language. This language, Pāli, serves as the school's sacred language and lingua franca. Besides the Pāli Canon, Theravāda scholastics also often rely on a post-canonical Pāli literature which comments on and interprets the Pāli Canon. These later works such as the *Visuddhimagga*, a doctrinal *summa* written in the fifth century by the exegete Buddhaghosa also remain influential today.

Theravāda derives from the Mahāvihāra (Tāmraparṇīya) sect, a Sri Lankan branch of the Vibhajyavāda Sthaviras, which began to establish itself on the island from the 3rd century BCE onwards.

Theravāda flourished in south India and Sri Lanka in ancient times; from there it spread for the first time into mainland Southeast Asia about the 11th century into its elite urban centres. By the 13th century, Theravāda had spread widely into the rural areas of mainland Southeast Asia, displacing Mahayana Buddhism and some traditions of Hinduism.

In the modern era, Buddhist figures such as Anagarika Dhammapala and King Mongkut sought to re-focus the

tradition on the Pāli Canon, as well as emphasize the rational and "scientific" nature of Theravāda while also opposing "superstition". This movement, often termed Buddhist modernism, has influenced most forms of modern Theravāda. Another influential modern turn in Theravāda is the Vipassana Movement, which led to the widespread adoption of meditation by laypersons.

Theravāda is primarily practised today in Sri Lanka, Burma, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia as well as small portions of China, Vietnam, Malaysia and Bangladesh. It has a growing presence in the west, especially as part of the Vipassana Movement.

Mahāyāna traditions

Mahāyāna ("Great Vehicle") refers to all forms of Buddhism which consider the Mahāyāna Sutras as authoritative scriptures and accurate rendering of Buddha's words. These traditions have been the more liberal form of Buddhism allowing different and new interpretations that emerged over time. The focus of Mahāyāna is the path of the bodhisattva (*bodhisattvayāna*), though what this path means is interpreted in many different ways.

The first Mahāyāna texts date to sometime between the 1st century BCE and the 2st century CE. It remained a minority movement until the time of the Guptas and Palas, when great Mahāyāna monastic centres of learning such as Nālandā University were established as evidenced by records left by three Chinese visitors to India. These universities supported Buddhist scholarship, as well as studies into non-Buddhist traditions and secular subjects such as medicine. They hosted

visiting students who then spread Buddhism to East and Central Asia.

Native Mahāyāna Buddhism is practised today in China, Japan, Korea, Singapore, parts of Russia and most of Vietnam (also commonly referred to as "Eastern Buddhism"). The Buddhism practised in Tibet, the Himalayan regions, and Mongolia is also a form of Mahāyāna, but is also different in many ways due to its adoption of tantric practices and is discussed below under the heading of "Vajrayāna" (also commonly referred to as "Northern Buddhism").

There are a variety of strands in Eastern Buddhism, of which "the Pure Land school of Mahāyāna is the most widely practised today." In most of China, these different strands and traditions are generally fused together. Vietnamese Mahāyāna is similarly very eclectic. In Japan in particular, they form separate denominations with the five major ones being: Nichiren, peculiar to Japan; Pure Land; Shingon, a form of Vajrayana; Tendai, and Zen. In Korea, nearly all Buddhists belong to the Chogye school, which is officially Son (Zen), but with substantial elements from other traditions.

Vajrayāna traditions

The goal and philosophy of the Vajrayāna remains Mahāyānist, but its methods are seen by its followers as far more powerful, so as to lead to Buddhahood in just one lifetime. The practice of using mantras was adopted from Hinduism, where they were first used in the Vedas.

Tibetan Buddhism preserves the Vajrayana teachings of eighth-century India. Tantric Buddhism is largely concerned with ritual and meditative practices. A central feature of Buddhist Tantra is deity yoga which includes visualisation and identification with an enlightened yidam or meditation deity and its associated mandala. Another element of Tantra is the need for ritual initiation or empowerment (abhi�eka) by a Guru or Lama. Some Tantras like the Guhyasamāja Tantra features new forms of antinomian ritual practice such as the use taboo substances like alcohol, sexual yoga, and charnel ground practices which evoke wrathful deities.

Monasteries and temples

Buddhist institutions are often housed and centered around monasteries (Sanskrit:*viharas*) and temples. Buddhist monastics originally followed a life of wandering, never staying in one place for long. During the three month rainy season (*vassa*) they would gather together in one place for a period of intense practice and then depart again. Some of the earliest Buddhist monasteries were at groves (*vanas*) or woods (*araññas*), such as Jetavana and Sarnath's Deer Park. There originally seems to have been two main types of monasteries, monastic settlements (*sangharamas*) were built and supported by donors, and woodland camps (*avasas*) were set up by monks. Whatever structures were built in these locales were made out of wood and were sometimes temporary structures built for the rainy season.

Over time, the wandering community slowly adopted more settled cenobitic forms of monasticism. Also, these monasteries

slowly evolved from the simpler collections of rustic dwellings of early Buddhism into larger more permanent structures meant to house the entire community, who now lived in a more collective fashion. During the Gupta era, even larger monastic university complexes (like Nalanda) arose, with larger and more artistically ornate structures, as well as large land grants and accumulated wealth.

There are many different forms of Buddhist structures. Classic Indian Buddhist institutions mainly made use of the following structures: monasteries, rock-hewn cave complexes (such as the Ajanta Caves), stupas (funerary mounds which contained relics), and temples such as the Mahabodhi Temple.

In Southeast Asia, the most widespread institutions are centered on wats, which refers to an establishment with various buildings such as an ordination hall, a library, monks' quarters and stupas. East Asian Buddhist institutions also use various structures including monastic halls, temples, lecture halls, bell towers and pagodas. In Japanese Buddhist temples, these different structures are usually grouped together in an area termed the garan. In Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, Buddhist institutions are generally housed in gompas. They include monastic quarters, stupas and prayer halls with Buddha images.

The complexity of Buddhist institutions varies, ranging from minimalist and rustic forest monasteries to large monastic centers like Tawang Monastery. The core of traditional Buddhist institutions is the monastic community (*Sangha)* who manage and lead religious services. They are supported by the

lay community who visit temples and monasteries for religious services and holidays.

In the modern era, the Buddhist "meditation centre", which is mostly used by laypersons and often also staffed by them, has also become widespread.

Buddhism in the modern era

Colonial era

Buddhism has faced various challenges and changes during the colonisation of Buddhist states by Christian countries and its persecution under modern states. Like other religions, the findings of modern science has challenged its basic premises. One response to some of these challenges has come to be called Buddhist modernism. Early Buddhist modernist figures such as the American convert Henry Olcott (1832–1907) and Anagarika Dharmapala (1864–1933) reinterpreted and promoted Buddhism as a scientific and rational religion which they saw as compatible with modern science.

East Asian Buddhism meanwhile suffered under various wars which ravaged China during the modern era, such as the Taiping rebellion and World War II (which also affected Korean Buddhism). During the Republican period (1912–49), a new movement called Humanistic Buddhism was developed by figures such as Taixu (1899–1947), and though Buddhist institutions were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), there has been a revival of the religion in China after 1977. Japanese Buddhism also went through a period of

modernisation during the Meiji period. In Central Asia meanwhile, the arrival of Communist repression to Tibet (1966–1980) and Mongolia (between 1924–1990) had a strong negative impact on Buddhist institutions, though the situation has improved somewhat since the 80s and 90s.

Buddhism in the West

While there were some encounters of Western travellers or missionaries such as St. Francis Xavier and Ippolito Desideri with Buddhist cultures, it was not until the 19th century that Buddhism began to be studied by Western scholars. It was the work of pioneering scholars such as Eugène Burnouf, Max Müller, Hermann Oldenberg and Thomas William Rhys Davids that paved the way for modern Buddhist studies in the West. The English words such as Buddhism, "Boudhist", "Bauddhist" and Buddhist were coined in the early 19th-century in the West, while in 1881, Rhys Davids founded the Pali Text Society – an influential Western resource of Buddhist literature in the Pali language and one of the earliest publisher of a journal on Buddhist studies. It was also during the 19th century that Asian Buddhist immigrants (mainly from China and Japan) began to arrive in Western countries such as the United States and Canada, bringing with them their Buddhist religion. This period also saw the first Westerners to formally convert to Buddhism, such as Helena Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott. An important event in the introduction of Buddhism to the West was the 1893 World Parliament of Religions, which for the first time saw well-publicized speeches by major Buddhist leaders alongside other religious leaders.

The 20th century saw a prolific growth of new Buddhist institutions in Western countries, including the Buddhist Society, London (1924), Das Buddhistische Haus (1924) and Datsan Gunzechoinei in St Petersburg. The publication and translations of Buddhist literature in Western languages thereafter accelerated. After the second world war, further immigration from Asia, globalisation, the secularisation on Western culture as well a renewed interest in Buddhism among the 60s counterculture led to further growth in Buddhist institutions. Influential figures on post-war Western Buddhism include Shunryu Suzuki, Jack Kerouac, Alan Watts, Thích Nh�t H�nh, and the 14th Dalai Lama. While Buddhist institutions have grown, some of the central premises of Buddhism such as the cycles of rebirth and Four Noble Truths have been problematic in the West. In contrast, states Christopher Gowans, for "most ordinary [Asian] Buddhists, today as well as in the past, their basic moral orientation is governed by belief in karma and rebirth". Most Asian Buddhist laypersons, states Kevin Trainor, have historically pursued Buddhist rituals and practices seeking better rebirth, not nirvana or freedom from rebirth.

Buddhism has spread across the world, and Buddhist texts are increasingly translated into local languages. While Buddhism in the West is often seen as exotic and progressive, in the East it is regarded as familiar and traditional. In countries such as Cambodia and Bhutan, it is recognised as the state religion and receives government support.

In certain regions such as Afghanistan and Pakistan, militants have targeted violence and destruction of historic Buddhist monuments.

Neo-Buddhism movements

A number of modern movements in Buddhism emerged during the second half of the 20th century. These new forms of Buddhism are diverse and significantly depart from traditional beliefs and practices.

In India, B.R. Ambedkar launched the Navayana tradition – literally, "new vehicle". Ambedkar's Buddhism rejects the foundational doctrines and historic practices of traditional Theravada and Mahayana traditions, such as monk lifestyle after renunciation, karma, rebirth, samsara, meditation, nirvana, Four Noble Truths and others. Ambedkar's Navayana Buddhism considers these as superstitions and re-interprets the original Buddha as someone who taught about class struggle and social equality. Ambedkar urged low caste Indian Dalits to convert to his Marxism-inspired reinterpretation called the Navayana Buddhism, also known as Bhimayana Buddhism. Ambedkar's effort led to the expansion of Navayana Buddhism in India.

The Thai King Mongkut (r. 1851–68), and his son King Chulalongkorn (r. 1868–1910), were responsible for modern reforms of Thai Buddhism. Modern Buddhist movements include Secular Buddhism in many countries, Won Buddhism in Korea, the Dhammakaya movement in Thailand and several Japanese organisations, such as Shinnyo-en, Risshō Kōsei Kai or Soka Gakkai.

Some of these movements have brought internal disputes and strife within regional Buddhist communities. For example, the Dhammakaya movement in Thailand teaches a "true self"

doctrine, which traditional Theravada monks consider as heretically denying the fundamental *anatta* (not-self) doctrine of Buddhism.

Sexual abuse and misconduct

Buddhism has not been immune from sexual abuse and misconduct scandals, with victims coming forward in various buddhist schools such as Zen and Tibetan. “There are huge cover ups in the Catholic church, but what has happened within Tibetan Buddhism is totally along the same lines,” says Mary Finnigan, an author and journalist who has been chronicling such alleged abuses since the mid-80s. One notably covered case in media of various Western country was that of Sogyal Rinpoche which began in 1994, and ended with his retirement from his position as Rigpa's spiritual director in 2017.

Cultural influence

Buddhism has had a profound influence on various cultures, especially in Asia. Buddhist philosophy, Buddhist art, Buddhist architecture, Buddhist cuisine and Buddhist festivals continue to be influential elements of the modern Culture of Asia, especially in East Asia and the Sinosphere as well as in Southeast Asia and the Indosphere. According to Litian Fang, Buddhism has "permeated a wide range of fields, such as politics, ethics, philosophy, literature, art and customs," in these Asian regions.

Buddhist teachings influenced the development of modern Hinduism as well as other Asian religions like Taoism and Confucianism. For example, various scholars have argued that key Hindu thinkers such as Adi Shankara and Patanjali, author of the Yoga sutras, were influenced by Buddhist ideas. Likewise, Buddhist practices were influential in the early development of Indian Yoga.

Buddhist philosophers like Dignaga were very influential in the development of Indian logic and epistemology. Buddhist educational institutions like Nalanda and Vikramashila preserved various disciplines of classical Indian knowledge such as Grammar and Medicine and taught foreign students from China.

In an effort to preserve their sacred scriptures, Buddhist institutions such as temples and monasteries housed schools which educated the populace and promoted writing and literacy. This led to high levels of literacy among some traditional Buddhist societies such as Burma. According to David Steinberg, "Early British observers claimed that Burma was the most literate state between Suez and Japan, and one British traveler in the early nineteenth century believed that Burmese women had a higher percentage of literacy than British women."

Buddhist institutions were also at the forefront of the adoption of Chinese technologies related to bookmaking, including paper, and block printing which Buddhists sometimes deployed on a large scale. The first surviving example of a printed text is a Buddhist charm, the first full printed book is the Buddhist

Diamond Sutra (c. 868) and the first hand colored print is an illustration of Guanyin dated to 947.

Buddhists were also influential in the study and practice of traditional forms of Indian medicine. Buddhists spread these traditional approaches to health, sometimes called "Buddhist medicine", throughout East and Southeast Asia, where they remain influential today in regions like Sri Lanka, Burma, Tibet and Thailand.

In the Western world, Buddhism has had a strong influence on modern New Age spirituality and other alternative spiritualities. This began with its influence on 20th century Theosophists such as Helena Blavatsky, which were some of the first Westerners to take Buddhism seriously as a spiritual tradition.

More recently, Buddhist meditation practices have influenced the development of modern psychology, particularly the practice of Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and other similar mindfulness based modalities. The influence of Buddhism on psychology can also be seen in certain forms of modern psychoanalysis.

Buddhism also influenced the modern avant-garde movements during the 1950s and 60s through people like D. T. Suzuki and his influence on figures like Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg.

Relationships with other religious traditions

Shamanism

Shamanism is a widespread practice in Buddhist societies. Buddhist monasteries have long existed alongside local shamanic traditions. Lacking an institutional orthodoxy, Buddhists adapted to the local cultures, blending their own traditions with pre-existing shamanic culture. There was very little conflict between the sects, mostly limited to the shamanic practice of animal sacrifice, which Buddhists see as equivalent to killing one's parents. However, Buddhism requires acceptance of Buddha as the greatest being in the cosmos, and local shamanic traditions were bestowed an inferior status.

Research into Himalayan religion has shown that Buddhist and shamanic traditions overlap in many respects: the worship of localized deities, healing rituals and exorcisms. The shamanic Gurung people have adopted some of the Buddhist beliefs such and rebirth but maintain the shamanic rites of "guiding the soul" after death. Geoffrey Samuel describes Shamanic Buddhism: "Vajrayana Buddhism as practiced in Tibet may be described as shamanic, in that it is centered around communication with an alternative mode of reality via the alternative states of consciousness of Tantric Yoga".

Demographics

- Buddhism is practised by an estimated 488 million, 495 million, or 535 million people as of the 2010s, representing 7% to 8% of the world's total population.

China is the country with the largest population of Buddhists, approximately 244 million or 18% of its total population. They are mostly followers of Chinese schools of *Mahayana*, making this the largest body of Buddhist traditions. Mahayana, also practised in broader East Asia, is followed by over half of world Buddhists.

According to a demographic analysis reported by Peter Harvey: *Mahayana* has 360 million adherents; *Theravada* has 150 million adherents; and *Vajrayana* has 18 million adherents.

According to Johnson & Grim (2013), Buddhism has grown from a total of 138 million adherents in 1910, of which 137 million were in Asia, to 495 million in 2010, of which 487 million are in Asia. Over 98% of all Buddhists live in the Asia-Pacific and South Asia region. North America had about 3.9 million Buddhists, Europe 1.3 million, while South America, Africa and the Middle East had an estimated combined total of about 1 million Buddhists in 2010.

Buddhism is the dominant religion in Bhutan, Myanmar, Cambodia, Hong Kong, Japan, Tibet, Laos, Macau, Mongolia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam. Large Buddhist populations live in Mainland China, Taiwan, North Korea,

Nepal and South Korea. In Russia, Buddhists form majority in Tuva (52%) and Kalmykia (53%). Buryatia (20%) and Zabaykalsky Krai (15%) also have significant Buddhist populations.

Buddhism is also growing by conversion. In United States, only about a third (32%) of Buddhists in the United States are Asian; a majority (53%) are white. Buddhism in the America is primarily made up of native-born adherents, whites and converts. In New Zealand, about 25–35% of the total Buddhists are converts to Buddhism. Buddhism has also spread to the Nordic countries; for example, the Burmese Buddhists founded in the city of Kuopio in North Savonia the first Buddhist monastery of Finland, named the Buddha Dhamma Ramsi monastery.

Chapter 6

Edicts of Ashoka

The **Edicts of Ashoka** are a collection of more than thirty inscriptions on the pillars, as well as boulders and cave walls, attributed to Emperor Ashoka of the Mauryan Empire who reigned from 268 BCE to 232 BCE. Ashoka used the expression *Dha▯ma Lipi* (Prakrit in the Brahmi script: ••••••••••••••, "Inscriptions of the Dharma") to describe his own Edicts. These inscriptions were dispersed throughout the areas of modern-day Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and provide the first tangible evidence of Buddhism. The edicts describe in detail Ashoka's view about dhamma, an earnest attempt to solve some of the problems that a complex society faced. According to the edicts, the extent of Buddhist proselytism during this period reached as far as the Mediterranean, and many Buddhist monuments were created.

These inscriptions proclaim Ashoka's adherence to the Buddhist philosophy which, as in Hinduism, is called dharma, "Law". The inscriptions show his efforts to develop the Buddhist dharma throughout his kingdom. Although Buddhism as well as Gautama Buddha are mentioned, the edicts focus on social and moral precepts rather than specific religious practices or the philosophical dimension of Buddhism. These were located in public places and were meant for people to read.

In these inscriptions, Ashoka refers to himself as "Beloved of the Gods" (*Devanampiya*). The identification of Devanampiya

with Ashoka was confirmed by an inscription discovered in 1915 by C. Beadon, a British gold-mining engineer, at Maski, a village in Raichur district of Karnataka. Another minor rock edict, found at the village Gujarra in Datia district of Madhya Pradesh, also used the name of Ashoka together with his titles: "*Devanampiya Piyadasi Asokaraja*". The inscriptions found in the central and eastern part of India were written in Magadhi Prakrit using the Brahmi script, while Prakrit using the Kharoshthi script, Greek and Aramaic were used in the northwest. These edicts were deciphered by British archaeologist and historian James Prinsep.

The inscriptions revolve around a few recurring themes: Ashoka's conversion to Buddhism, the description of his efforts to spread Buddhism, his moral and religious precepts, and his social and animal welfare program. The edicts were based on Ashoka's ideas on administration and behaviour of people towards one another and religion.

Decipherment

Besides a few inscriptions in Greek and Aramaic (which were discovered only in the 20th century), the Edicts were mostly written in the Brahmi script and sometimes in the Kharoshthi script in the northwest, two Indian scripts which had both become extinct around the 5th century CE, and were yet undeciphered at the time the Edicts were discovered and investigated in the 19th century.

The first successful attempts at deciphering the ancient Brahmi script were made in 1836 by Norwegian scholar

Christian Lassen, who used the bilingual Greek-Brahmi coins of Indo-Greek king Agathocles to correctly and securely identify several Brahmi letters. The task was then completed by James Prinsep, an archaeologist, philologist, and official of the East India Company, who was able to identify the rest of the Brahmi characters, with the help of Major Cunningham. In a series of results that he published in March 1838 Prinsep was able to translate the inscriptions on a large number of rock edicts found around India, and to provide, according to Richard Salomon, a "virtually perfect" rendering of the full Brahmi alphabet. The edicts in Brahmi script mentioned a King Devanampriya Piyadasi which Prinsep initially assumed was a Sri Lankan king. He was then able to associate this title with Ashoka on the basis of Pali script from Sri Lanka communicated to him by George Turnour.

The Kharoshthi script, written from right to left, and associated with Aramaic, was also deciphered by James Prinsep in parallel with Christian Lassen, using the bilingual Greek-Kharoshthi coinage of the Indo-Greek and Indo-Scythian kings. "Within the incredibly brief space of three years (1834-37) the mystery of both the Kharoshthi and Brahmi scripts (were unlocked), the effect of which was instantly to remove the thick crust of oblivion which for many centuries had concealed the character and the language of the earliest epigraphs".

The Edicts

The Edicts are divided into four categories, according to their size (Minor or Major) and according to their medium (Rock or

Pillar). Chronologically, the minor inscriptions tend to precede the larger ones, while rock inscriptions generally seem to have been started earlier than the pillar inscriptions:

- Minor Rock Edicts: Edicts inscribed at the beginning of Ashoka's reign; in Prakrit, Greek and Aramaic.
- Minor Pillar Edicts: Schism Edict, Queen's Edict, Rummindei Edict, Nigali Sagar Edict; in Prakrit.
- Major Rock Edicts: 14 Edicts (termed 1st to 14th) and 2 separate ones found in Odisha; in Prakrit and Greek.
- Major Pillar Edicts: 7 Edicts, inscribed at the end of Ashoka's reign; in Prakrit.
- General content

The Minor Rock Edicts (in which Ashoka is sometimes named in person, as in Maski and Gujarra) as well as the Minor Pillar Edicts are very religious in their content: they mention extensively the Buddha (and even previous Buddhas as in the Nigali Sagar inscription), the Sangha, Buddhism and Buddhist scriptures (as in the Bairat Edict).

On the contrary, the Major Rock Edicts and Major Pillar Edicts are essentially moral and political in nature: they never mention the Buddha or explicit Buddhist teachings, but are preoccupied with order, proper behaviour and non violence under the general concept of "Dharma", and they also focus on the administration of the state and positive relations with foreign countries as far as the Hellenistic Mediterranean of the mid-3rd century BCE.

Minor Rock Edicts

The Minor Rock Edicts of Ashoka (r.269-233 BCE) are rock inscriptions which form the earliest part of the Edicts of Ashoka. They predate Ashoka's Major Rock Edicts.

Chronologically, the first known edict, sometimes classified as a Minor Rock Edict, is the Kandahar Bilingual Rock Inscription, in Greek and in Aramaic, written in the 10th year of his reign (260 BCE) at the border of his empire with the Hellenistic world, in the city of Old Kandahar in modern Afghanistan.

Ashoka then made the first edicts in the Indian language, written in the Brahmi script, from the 11th year of his reign (according to his own inscription, "two and a half years after becoming a secular Buddhist", i.e. two and a half years at least after returning from the Kalinga conquest of the eighth year of his reign, which is the starting point for his remorse towards the horrors of the war, and his gradual conversion to Buddhism). The texts of the inscriptions are rather short, the technical quality of the engraving of the inscriptions is generally very poor, and generally very inferior to the pillar edicts dated to the years 26 and 27 of Ashoka's reign.

There are several slight variations in the content of these edicts, depending on location, but a common designation is usually used, with Minor Rock Edict N°1 (MRE1) and a Minor Rock Edict N°2 (MRE2, which does not appear alone but always in combination with Edict N°1), the different versions being generally aggregated in most translations. The Maski version of Minor Rock Edict No.1 is historically particularly important in

that it confirmed the association of the title "Devanampriya" with the name "Asoka", thereby clarifying the historical author of all these inscriptions. In the Gujarra version of Minor Rock Edict No.1 also, the name of Ashoka is used together with his full title: *Devanampiya Piyadasi Asokaraja.*

There is also a unique Minor Rock Edict No.3, discovered next to Bairat Temple, for the Buddhist clergy, which gives a list of Buddhist scriptures (most of them unknown today) which the clergy should study regularly.

A few other inscriptions of Ashoka in Aramaic, which are not strictly edicts, but tend to share a similar content, are sometimes also categorized as "Minor Rock Edicts". The dedicatory inscriptions of the Barabar caves are also sometimes classified among the Minor Rock Edicts of Ashoka.

The Minor Rock Edicts can be found throughout the territory of Ashoka, including in the frontier area near the Hindu Kush, and are especially numerous in the southern, newly conquered, frontier areas of Karnataka and southern Andhra Pradesh.

Minor Pillar Edicts

The Minor Pillar Edicts of Ashoka refer to 5 separate minor Edicts inscribed on columns, the Pillars of Ashoka. These edicts are preceded chronologically by the Minor Rock Edicts and may have been made in parallel with the Major Rock Edicts.

The inscription technique is generally very poor compared for example to the later Major Pillar Edicts, however the Minor

Pillar Edicts are often associated with some of the artistically most sophisticated pillar capitals of Ashoka, such as the renowned Lion Capital of Ashoka which crowned the Sarnath Minor Pillar Edict, or the very similar, but less well preserved Sanchi lion capital which crowned the very clumsily inscribed Schism Edict of Sanchi. According to Irwin, the Brahmi inscriptions on the Sarnath and Sanchi pillars were made by inexperienced Indian engravers at a time when stone engraving was still new in India, whereas the very refined Sarnath capital itself was made under the tutelage of crafstmen from the former Achaemenid Empire, trained in Perso-Hellenistic statuary and employed by Ashoka. This suggests that the most sophisticated capitals were actually the earliest in the sequence of Ashokan pillars and that style degraded over a short period of time.

These edicts were probably made at the beginning of the reign of Ashoka (reigned 268-232 BCE), from the year 12 of his reign, that is, from 256 BCE.

The Minor Pillar Edicts are the Schism Edict, warning of punishment for dissent in the Samgha, the Queen's Edict, and the Rummindei Edict as well as the Nigali Sagar Edict which record Ashoka's visits and Buddhist dedications in the area corresponding to today's Nepal. The Rummindei and Nigali Sagar edicts, inscribed on pillars erected by Ashoka later in his reign (19th and 20th year) display a high level of inscriptional technique with a good regularity in the lettering.

Major Rock Edicts

The Major Rock Edicts of Ashoka refer to 14 separate major Edicts, which are significantly detailed and extensive. These Edicts were concerned with practical instructions in running the kingdom such as the design of irrigation systems and descriptions of Ashoka's beliefs in peaceful moral behavior. They contain little personal detail about his life. These edicts are preceded chronologically by the Minor Rock Edicts.

Three languages were used, Prakrit, Greek and Aramaic. The edicts are composed in non-standardized and archaic forms of Prakrit. Prakrit inscriptions were written in Brahmi and Kharosthi scripts, which even a commoner could read and understand. The inscriptions found in the area of Pakistan are in the Kharoshthi script. Other Edicts are written in Greek or Aramaic. The Kandahar Greek Edict of Ashoka (including portions of Edict No.13 and No.14) is in Greek only, and originally probably contained all the Major Rock Edicts 1-14.

The Major Rock Edicts of Ashoka are inscribed on large rocks, except for the Kandahar version in Greek (Kandahar Greek Edict of Ashoka), written on a stone plaque belonging to a building. The Major Edicts are not located in the heartland of Mauryan territory, traditionally centered on Bihar, but on the frontiers of the territory controlled by Ashoka.

Major Pillar Edicts

The Major Pillar Edicts of Ashoka refer to seven separate major Edicts inscribed on columns, the Pillars of Ashoka, which are significantly detailed and extensive.

These edicts are preceded chronologically by the Minor Rock Edicts and the Major Rock Edicts, and constitute the most technically elegant of the inscriptions made by Ashoka. They were made at the end of his reign, from the years 26 and 27 of his reign, that is, from 237-236 BCE. Chronologically they follow the fall of Seleucid power in Central Asia and the related rise of the Parthian Empire and the independent Greco-Bactrian Kingdom circa 250 BCE. Hellenistic rulers are not mentioned anymore in these last edicts, as they only appear in Major Rock Edict No.13 (and to a lesser extent Major Rock Edict No.2), which can be dated to about the 14th year of the reign of Ashoka circa 256–255. The last Major Pillar Edicts (Edict No.7) is testamental in nature, making a summary of the accomplishments of Ashoka during his life.

The Major Pillar Edicts of Ashoka were exclusively inscribed on the Pillars of Ashoka or fragments thereof, at Kausambi (now Allahabad pillar), Topra Kalan, Meerut, Lauriya-Araraj, Lauria Nandangarh, Rampurva (Champaran), and fragments of these in Aramaic (Kandahar, Edict No.7 and Pul-i-Darunteh, Edict No.5 or No.7 in Afghanistan) However several pillars, such as the bull pillar of Rampurva, or the pillar of Vaishali do not have inscriptions, which, together with their lack of proper foundation stones and their particular style, led some authors to suggest that they were in fact pre-Ashokan.

The Major Pillar Edicts (excluding the two fragments of translations found in modern Afghanistan) are all located in central India.

The Pillars of Ashoka are stylistically very close to an important Buddhist monument, also built by Ashoka in Bodh Gaya, at the location where the Buddha had reached enlightenment some 200 years earlier: the Diamond Throne. The sculpted decorations on the Diamond Throne clearly echoe the decorations found on the Pillars of Ashoka. The Pillars dated to the end of Ashoka's reign are associated with pillar capitals that tend to be more solemn and less elegant than the earlier capitals, such as those of Sanchi or Sarnath. This led some authors to suggest that the artistic level under Ashoka tended to fall towards the end of his reign.

Languages of the Edicts

Three languages were used: Ashokan Prakrit, Greek (the language of the neighbouring Greco-Bactrian kingdom and the Greek communities in Ashoka's realm) and Aramaic (the official language of the former Achaemenid Empire). The Prakrit displayed local variations, from early Gandhari in the northwest, to Old Ardhamagadhi in the east, where it was the "chancery language" of the court. The language level of the Prakrit inscriptions tends to be rather informal or colloquial.

Four scripts were used. Prakrit inscriptions were written in the Brahmi and Kharosthi scripts, the latter for the area of modern Pakistan. The Greek and Aramaic inscriptions used their

respective scripts, in the northwestern areas of Ashoka's territory, in modern Pakistan and Afghanistan.

While most Edicts were in Ashokan Prakrit, a few were written in Greek or Aramaic. The Kandahar Rock Inscription is bilingual Greek-Aramaic. The Kandahar Greek Edict of Ashoka is in Greek only, and originally probably contained all the Major Rock Edicts 1-14. The Greek language used in the inscription is of a very high level and displays philosophical refinement. It also displays an in-depth understanding of the political language of the Hellenic world in the 3rd century BCE. This suggests the presence of a highly cultured Greek presence in Kandahar at that time.

By contrast, in the rock edicts engraved in southern India in the newly conquered territories of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, Ashoka only used the Prakrit of the North as the language of communication, with the Brahmi script, and not the local Dravidian idiom, which can be interpreted as a kind of authoritarianism in respect to the southern territories.

Ashoka's edicts were the first written inscriptions in India after the ancient city of Harrapa fell to ruin. Due to the influence of Ashoka's Prakrit inscriptions, Prakrit would remain the main inscriptional language for the following centuries, until the rise of inscriptional Sanskrit from the 1st century CE.

Content of the Edicts

The Dharma preached by Ashoka is explained mainly in term of moral precepts, based on the doing of good deeds, respect for others, generosity and purity. The expressions used by Ashoka

to express the Dharma, were the Prakrit word *Dhaṃma*, the Greek word *Eusebeia* (in the Kandahar Bilingual Rock Inscription and the Kandahar Greek Edict of Ashoka), and the Aramaic word *Qsyt* ("Truth") (in the Kandahar Bilingual Rock Inscription).

Moral precepts

- Right behaviour

Dharma is good. And what is Dharma? It is having few faults and many goods deeds, mercy, charity, truthfulness and purity. (Major Pillar Edict No.2)

Thus the glory of Dhamma will increase throughout the world, and it will be endorsed in the form of mercy, charity, truthfulness, purity, gentleness, and virtue. (Major Pillar Edict No. 7)

- Benevolence

Ashoka's Dharma meant that he used his power to try to make life better for his people and he also tried to change the way people thought and lived. He also thought that dharma meant doing the right thing.

- Kindness to prisoners

Ashoka showed great concern for fairness in the exercise of justice, caution and tolerance in the application of sentences, and regularly pardoned prisoners.

But it is desirable that there should be uniformity in judicial procedure and punishment. This is my instruction from now on. Men who are imprisoned or sentenced to death are to be given three days respite. Thus their relations may plead for their lives, or, if there is no one to plead for them, they may make donations or undertake a fast for a better rebirth in the next life. For it is my wish that they should gain the next world. (Major Pillar Edict No. 4)

In the period [from my consecration] to [the anniversary on which] I had been consecrated twenty-six years, twenty-five releases of prisoners have been made. (Major Pillar Edict No. 5)

- Respect for animal life

The Mauryan empire was the first Indian empire to unify the country and it had a clear-cut policy of exploiting as well as protecting natural resources with specific officials tasked with protection duty. When Ashoka embraced Buddhism in the latter part of his reign, he brought about significant changes in his style of governance, which included providing protection to fauna, and even relinquished the royal hunt. He was perhaps the first ruler in history to advocate conservation measures for wildlife. Reference to these can be seen inscribed on the stone edicts.

This rescript on morality has been caused to be written by Devanampriya Priyadarsin. Here no living being must be killed and sacrificed. And also no festival meeting must be held. For king Devanampriya Priyadarsin sees much evil in festival meetings. And there are also some festival meetings which are considered meritorious by king Devanampriya Priyadarsin. Formerly in the kitchen of king Devanampriya Priyadarsin

many hundred thousands of animals were killed daily for the sake of curry. But now, when this rescript on morality is caused to be written, then only three animals are being killed (daily), (viz.) two peacocks (and) one deer, but even this deer not regularly. But even these three animals shall not be killed (in future). (Major Rock Edict No.1)

King Devanampriya Priyadansin speaks thus. (When I had been) anointed twenty-six years, the following animals were declared by me inviolable, viz. parrots, mainas, the aruna, ruddy geese, wild geese, the nandimukha, the gelata, bats, queen-ants, terrapins, boneless fish, the vedaveyaka, the Ganga-puputaka, skate-fish, tortoises and porcupines, squirrels (?), the srimara, bulls set at liberty, iguanas (?), the rhinoceros, white doves, domestic doves, (and) all the quadrupeds which are neither useful nor edible. Those [she-goats], ewes, and sows (which are) either with young or in milk, are inviolable, and also those (of their) young ones (which are) less than six months old. Cocks must not be caponed. Husks containing living animals must not be burnt. Forests must not be burnt either uselessly or in order to destroy (living beings). Living animals must not be fed with (other) living animals. (Major Pillar Edict No.5)

Ashoka advocated restraint in the number that had to be killed for consumption, protected some of them, and in general condemned violent acts against animals, such as castration.

However, the edicts of Ashoka reflect more the desire of rulers than actual events; the mention of a 100 'panas' (coins) fine for poaching deer in royal hunting preserves shows that rule-breakers did exist. The legal restrictions conflicted with the

practices then freely exercised by the common people in hunting, felling, fishing and setting fires in forests.

Religious precepts

- Buddhism

Explicit mentions of Buddhism or the Buddha only appear in the Minor Rock Edicts and the Minor Pillar Edicts. Beyond affirming himself as a Buddhist and spreading the moral virtues of Buddhism, Ashoka also insisted that the word of the Buddha be read and followed, in particular in monastic circles (the Sanghas), in a unique edict (Minor Rock Edict No.3), found in front of the Bairat Temple

I have been a Buddhist layman ("Budha-Shake" in the Maski edict, *upāshake* in others) for more than two and a half years, but for a year I did not make much progress. Now for more than a year I have drawn closer to the Order and have become more ardent. (Minor Rock Edict No.1)

The king of Magadha, Piyadassi, greets the Order and wishes it prosperity and freedom from care. You know Sirs, how deep is my respect for and faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Samgha [i.e. the Buddhist creed]. Sirs, whatever was spoken by the Lord Buddha was well spoken. (Minor Rock Edict No.3)

These sermons on Dhamma, Sirs - the Excellence of the Discipline, the Lineage of the Noble One, the Future Fears, the Verses of,the Sage, the Sutra of Silence, the Question, of Upatissa, and the Admonition spoken by the Lord Buddha to Rahula on the subject of false speech - these sermons on the

Dhamma, Sirs, I desire that many monks and nuns should hear frequently and meditate upon, and likewise laymen and laywomen. (Minor Rock Edict No.3)

Ashoka also expressed his devotion for the Buddhas of the past, such as the Koṇāgamana Buddha, for whom he enlarged a stupa in the 14th year of his reign, and made a dedication and set up a pillar during a visit in person in the 20th year of his reign, as described in his Minor Pillar Edict of Nigali Sagar, in modern Nepal.

- Belief in a next world

By doing so, there is gain in this world, and in the next there is infinite merit, through the gift of Dhamma. (Major Rock Edict No.11)

It is hard to obtain happiness in this world and the next without extreme love of Dhamma, much vigilance, much obedience, much fear of sin, and extreme energy. (Major Pillar Edict No. 1)

- Religious exchange

Far from being sectarian, Ashoka, based on a belief that all religions shared a common, positive essence, encouraged tolerance and understanding of other religions.

The Beloved of the Gods, the king Piyadassi, wishes that all sect may dwell in all places, for all seek self-control and purity of mind. (Major Rock Edict No.7

For whosoever praises his own sect or blames other sects, — all (this) out of pure devotion to his own sect, (i.e.) with the view of glorifying his own sect, — if he is acting thus, he rather injures his own sect very severely. But concord is meritorious, (i.e.) that they should both hear and obey each other's morals. For this is the desire of Devanampriya, (viz.) that all sects should be both full of learning and pure in doctrine. And those who are attached to their respective (sects), ought to be spoken to (as follows). Devanampriya does not value either gifts or honours so (highly) as (this), (viz.) that a promotion of the essentials of all sects should take place. (Major Rock Edict No.12

Social and animal welfare

According to the edicts, Ashoka took great care of the welfare of his subjects (human and animal), and those beyond his borders, spreading the use of medicinal treatments, improving roadside facilities for more comfortable travel, and establishing "officers of the faith" throughout his territories to survey the welfare of the population and the propagation of the Dharma. The Greek king Antiochos ("the Yona king named Antiyoga" in the text of the Edicts) is also named as a recipient of Ashoka's generosity, together with the other kings neighbouring him.

- Medicinal treatments

Everywhere in the dominions of king Devanampriya Priyadarsin and (of those) who (are his) borderers, such as the Chodas, the Pandyas, the Satiyaputa, the Kelalaputa, Tamraparni, the Yona king named Antiyoga, and the other kings who are the neighbours of this Antiyoga, everywhere two (kinds of) medical

treatment were established by king Devanampriya Priyadarsin, (viz.) medical treatment for men and medical treatment for cattle. Wherever there were no herbs beneficial to men and beneficial to cattle, everywhere they were caused to be imported and to be planted. Likewise, wherever there were no roots and fruits, everywhere they were caused to be imported and to be planted. On the roads trees were planted, and wells were caused to be dug for the use of cattle and men. (Major Rock Edict No. 2, Khalsi version)

- Roadside facilities

On the roads banyan-trees were caused to be planted by me, (in order that) they might afford shade to cattle and men, (and) mango-groves were caused to be planted. And (at intervals) of eight kos wells were caused to be dug by me, and flights of steps (for descending into the water) were caused to be built. Numerous drinking-places were caused to be established by me, here and there, for the enjoyment of cattle and men. [But] this so-called enjoyment (is) [of little consequence]. For with various comforts have the people been blessed both by former kings and by myself. But by me this has been done for the following purpose: that they might conform to that practice of morality. (Major Pillar Edict No.7)

- Officers of the faith

Now, in times past (officers) called Mahamatras of morality did not exist before. Mahdmatras of morality were appointed by me (when I had been) anointed thirteen years. These are occupied with all sects in establishing morality, in promoting morality, and for the welfare and happiness of those who are devoted to morality (even) among the Yona, Kambojas, and Gandharas,

and whatever other western borderers (of mine there are). They are occupied with servants and masters, with Brahmanas and Ibhiyas, with the destitute; (and) with the aged, for the welfare and happiness of those who are devoted to morality, (and) in releasing (them) from the fetters (of worldly life). (Major Rock Edict No.5)

Ashoka's proselytism according to the Edicts

In order to propagate welfare, Ashoka explains that he sent emissaries and medicinal plants to the Hellenistic kings as far as the Mediterranean, and to people throughout India, claiming that Dharma had been achieved in all their territories as well. He names the Greek rulers of the time, inheritors of the conquest of Alexander the Great, from Bactria to as far as Greece and North Africa, as recipients of the Dharma, displaying a clear grasp of the political situation at the time.

Proselytism beyond India

Now, it is the conquest by the Dharma that the Beloved of the Gods considers as the best conquest. And this one (the conquest by the Dharma) was won here, on the borders, and even 600 yojanas (leagues) from here, where the king Antiochos reigns, and beyond where reign the four kings Ptolemy, Antigonos, Magas and Alexander, likewise in the south, where live the Cholas, the Pandyas, and as far as Tamraparni.

- *—Extract from Major Rock Edict No.13.*

The distance of 600 yojanas (4,800 to 6,000 miles) corresponds roughly to the distance between the center of India and Greece.

In the Gandhari original Antiochos is referred to as *"Amtiyoge nama Yona-raja"* (lit. "The Greek king by the name of Antiokos"), beyond whom live the four other kings: *"param ca tena Atiyogena cature 4 rajani Tulamaye nama Amtekine nama Makā nama Alikasudaro nama"* (lit. "And beyond Antiochus, four kings by the name of Ptolemy, the name of Antigonos, the name of Magas, the name Alexander".

- **Amtiyaka** (•••••••••••••) or Amtiyoga (••••••••⫫••), refers to Antiochus II Theos of Syria (261–246 BCE), who controlled the Seleucid Empire from Syria to Bactria in the east from 305 to 250 BCE, and was therefore a direct neighbor of Ashoka.
- **Tulamāya** (•••••••••••••) refers to Ptolemy II Philadelphos of Egypt (285–247 BCE), king of the dynasty founded by Ptolemy I, a former general of Alexander the Great, in Egypt.
- **Amtekina** (•••••••••••••••) refers to Antigonus II Gonatas of Macedon (278–239 BCE).
- **Makā** (••••••) refers to Magas of Cyrene (300–258 BCE).
- **Alikya�adala** (•••••••••⚓•••••••) refers to Alexander II of Epirus (272–258 BCE).
- Emissaries

It is not clear in Hellenic records whether these emissaries were actually received, or had any influence on the Hellenic

world. But the existence of the edicts in a very high-level Greek literary and philosophical language testifies to the high sophistication of the Greek community of Kandahar, and to a true communication between Greek intellectuals and Indian thought. According to historian Louis Robert, it becomes quite likely that these Kandahar Greeks who were very familiar with Indian culture could in turn transmit Indian ideas to the philosophical circles of the Mediterranean world, in Seleucia, Antioch, Alexandria, Pella or Cyrene. He suggests that the famous Ashoka emissaries sent to the Western Hellenistic Courts according to Ashoka's Major Rock Edict No.13 were in fact Greek subjects and citizens of Kandahar, who had the full capacity to carry out these embassies.

Another document, the *Mahavamsa* (XII, 1st paragraph), also states that in the 17th year of his reign, at the end of the Third Buddhist Council, Ashoka sent Buddhist missionaries to eight parts of Southern Asia and the "country of the Yonas" (Greeks) to propagate Buddhism.

- Presence in the West

Overall, the evidence for the presence of Buddhists in the west from that time is very meager. But some scholars point to the possible presence of Buddhist communities in the Hellenistic world, in particular in Alexandria. Dio Chrysostum wrote to Alexandrians that there are "Indians who view the spectacles with you and are with you on all occasions" (Oratio.XXXII.373). According to Ptolemy also, Indians were present in Alexandria, to whom he was much endebted for his knowledge of India (As.Res.III.53). Clement of Alexandria too mentioned the presence of Indians in Alexandria. A possible Buddhist

gravestone from the Ptolemaic period has been found by Flinders Petrie, decorated with a depiction of what may be Wheel of the Law and Trishula. According to the 11th century Muslim historian Al-Biruni, before the advent of Islam, Buddhists were present in Western Asia as far as the frontiers of Syria.

- Possible influences on Western thought

Colonial era scholars such as Rhys Davids have attributed Ashoka's claims of "Dharmic conquest" to mere vanity, and expressed disbelief that Greeks could have been in any way influenced by Indian thought.

But numerous authors have noted the parallels between Buddhism, Cyrenaicism and Epicureanism, which all strive for a state of ataraxia ("equanimity") away from the sorrows of life. The positions of philosophers such as Hegesias of Cyrene were close to Buddhism, his ideas recalling the Buddhist doctrine of suffering: he lived in the city of Cyrene where Magas ruled, the same Magas under whom the Dharma prospered according to Ashoka, and he may have been influenced by Ashoka's missionaries.

The religious communities of the Essenes of Palestine and the Therapeutae of Alexandria may also have been communities based on the model of Buddhist monasticism, following Ashoka's missions. According to semitologist André Dupont-Sommer, speaking about the consequences of Ashoka's proselytism: "It is India which would be, according to us, at the beginning of this vast monastic current which shone with a strong brightness during about three centuries in Judaism itself". This influence would even contribute, according to

André Dupont-Sommer, to the emergence of Christianity: "Thus was prepared the ground on which Christianity, that sect of Jewish origin influenced by the Essenes, which was so quickly and so powerfully to conquer a very large part of the world."

Proselytism within Ashoka's territories

Inside India proper, in the realm of Ashoka, many different populations were the object of the King's proselytism. Greek communities also lived in the northwest of the Mauryan empire, currently in Pakistan, notably ancient Gandhara, and in the region of Gedrosia, nowadays in Southern Afghanistan, following the conquest and the colonization efforts of Alexander the Great around 323 BCE. These communities therefore seem to have been still significant during the reign of Ashoka. The Kambojas are a people of Central Asian origin who had settled first in Arachosia and Drangiana (today's southern Afghanistan), and in some of the other areas in the northwestern Indian subcontinent in Sindhu, Gujarat and Sauvira. The Nabhakas, the Nabhapamkits, the Bhojas, the Pitinikas, the Andhras and the Palidas were other people under Ashoka's rule:

Here in the king's domain among the Greeks, the Kambojas, the Nabhakas, the Nabhapamkits, the Bhojas, the Pitinikas, the Andhras and the Palidas, everywhere people are following Beloved-of-the-Gods' instructions in Dhamma. Rock Edict Nb13 (S. Dhammika)

Influences

Achaemenid inscriptional tradition

The inscriptions of Ashoka may show Achaemenid influences, including formulaic parallels with Achaemenid inscriptions, presence of Iranian loanwords (in Aramaic inscriptions), and the very act of engraving edicts on rocks and mountains (compare for example Behistun inscription). To describe his own Edicts, Ashoka used the word *Lipī* (••••••••), now generally simply translated as "writing" or "inscription". It is thought the word "lipi", which is also orthographed "dipi" (••••••••) in the two Kharosthi versions of the rock edicts, comes from an Old Persian prototype *dipî* (••••••••) also meaning "inscription", which is used for example by Darius I in his Behistun inscription, suggesting borrowing and diffusion. There are other borrowings of Old Persian terms for writing-related words in the Edicts of Ahoka, such as *nipista* or *nipesita* (•••••••••••••, "written" and "made to be written") in the Kharoshthi version of Major Rock Edict No.4, which can be related to the word *nipištā* (•••••••••••••, "written") from the *daiva* inscription of Xerxes at Persepolis.

Hellenistic inscriptions

It has also been suggested that inscriptions bearing the Delphic maxims from the Seven Sages of Greece, inscribed by philosopher Clearchus of Soli in the neighbouring city of Ai-Khanoum circa 300 BCE, may have influenced the writings of Ashoka. These Greek inscriptions, located in the central square

of Ai-Khanoum, put forward traditional Greek moral rules which are very close to the Edicts, both in term of formulation and content.

Ancestor of the Hindu-Arabic numeral system

The first examples of the Hindu-Arabic numeral system appeared in the Brahmi numerals used in the Edicts of Ashoka, in which a few numerals are found, although the system is not yet positional (the zero, together with a mature positional system, was invented much later around the 6th century CE) and involves different symbols for units, dozens or hundreds. This system is later further documented with more numerals in the Nanaghat inscriptions (1st century BCE), and later in the Nasik Caves inscriptions (2nd century CE), to acquire designs which are largely similar to the Hindu-Arabic numerals used today.

The number "6" in particular appears in Minor Rock Edict No.1 when Ashoka explains he has "been on tour for 256 days". The evolution to the modern glyph for 6 appears rather straightforward. It was written in one stroke, somewhat like a cursive lowercase "e". Gradually, the upper part of the stroke (above the central squiggle) became more curved, while the lower part of the stroke (below the central squiggle) became straighter. The Arabs dropped the part of the stroke below the squiggle. From there, the European evolution to the modern 6 was very straightforward, aside from a flirtation with a glyph that looked more like an uppercase G.

Influence on the Indian epigraphy

Ashokan inscriptions in Prakrit precede by several centuries inscriptions in Sanskrit, probably owing to the great prestige which Ashokan inscriptions gave to the Prakrit language. Louis Renou called it "the great linguistical paradox of India" that the Sanskrit inscriptions appear later than Prakrit inscriptions, although Prakrit is considered as a descendant of the Sanskrit language.

Ashoka was probably the first Indian ruler to create stone inscriptions, and in doing so, he began an important Indian tradition of royal epigraphical inscriptions. The earliest known stone inscriptions in Sanskrit are in the Brahmi script from the first century BCE. These early Sanskrit inscriptions include the Ayodhyā (Uttar Pradesh) and Hāthībādā-Ghosuṇḍī (near Chittorgarh, Rajasthan) inscriptions. Other important inscriptions dated to the 1st century BCE, in relatively accurate classical Sanskrit and Brahmi script are the Yavanarajya inscription on a red sandstone slab and the long Naneghat inscription on the wall of a cave rest stop in the Western Ghats. Besides these few examples from the 1st century BCE, the bulk of early Sanskrit inscriptions were made from the 1st and 2nd-century CE by the Indo-Scythian Northern Satraps in Mathura (Uttar Pradesh), and the Western Satraps in Gujarat and Maharashtra. According to Salomon, the Scythian rulers of northern and western India while not the originators, were promoters of the use of Sanskrit language for inscriptions, and "their motivation in promoting Sanskrit was presumably a desire to establish themselves as legitimate

Indian or at least Indianized rulers and to curry the favor of the educated Brahmanical elite".

The Brahmi script used in the Edicts of Ashoka, as well as the Prakrit language of these inscriptions was in popular use down through the Kushan period, and remained readable down to the 4th century CE during the Gupta period. After that time the script underwent significant evolutions which rendered the Ashokan inscriptions unreadable. This still means that Ashoka's Edicts were for everyone to see and understand for a period of nearly 700 years in India, suggesting that they remained significantly influential for a long time.

Questions of authorship

According to some scholars such as Christopher I. Beckwith, Ashoka, whose name only appears in the Minor Rock Edicts, should be differentiated from the ruler Piyadasi, or *Devanampiya* Piyadasi (i.e. "Beloved of the Gods Piyadasi", "Beloved of the Gods" being a fairly widespread title for "King"), who is named as the author of the Major Pillar Edicts and the Major Rock Edicts. Beckwith also highlights the fact that Buddhism nor the Buddha are mentioned in the Major Edicts, but only in the Minor Edicts. Further, the Buddhist notions described in the Minor Edicts (such as the Buddhist canonical writings in Minor Edict No.3 at Bairat, the mention of a Buddha of the past Kanakamuni Buddha in the Nigali Sagar Minor Pillar Edict) are more characteristic of the "Normative Buddhism" of the Saka-Kushan period around the 2nd century CE.

This inscriptional evidence may suggest that Piyadasi and Ashoka were two different rulers. According to Beckwith, Piyadasi was living in the 3rd century BCE, probably the son of Chandragupta Maurya known to the Greeks as Amitrochates, and only advocating for piety ("Dharma") in his Major Pillar Edicts and Major Rock Edicts, without ever mentioning Buddhism, the Buddha or the Samgha. Since he does mention a pilgrimage to *Sambhodi* (Bodh Gaya, in Major Rock Edict No.8) however, he may have adhered to an "early, pietistic, popular" form of Buddhism. Also, the geographical spread of his inscription shows that Piyadasi ruled a vast Empire, contiguous with the Seleucid Empire in the West.

On the contrary, for Beckwith, Ashoka himself was a later king of the 1st-2nd century CE, whose name only appears explicitly in the Minor Rock Edicts and allusively in the Minor Pillar Edicts, and who does mention the Buddha and the Samgha, explicitly promoting Buddhism. He may have been an unknown or possibly invented ruler named Devanampriya Asoka, with the intent of propagating a later, more institutional version of the Buddhist faith. His inscriptions cover a very different and much smaller geographical area, clustering in Central India. According to Beckwith, the inscriptions of this later Ashoka were typical of the later forms of "normative Buddhism", which are well attested from inscriptions and Gandhari manuscripts dated to the turn of the millennium, and around the time of the Kushan Empire. The quality of the inscriptions of this Ashoka is significantly lower than the quality of the inscriptions of the earlier Piyadasi.

However, many of Beckwith's methodologies and interpretations concerning early Buddhism, inscriptions, and

archaeological sites have been criticized by other scholars, such as Johannes Bronkhorst and Osmund Bopearachchi.

Chapter 7

Kunala

Kunala was a son of Emperor Ashoka and Queen Padmavati and the presumptive heir to Ashoka, thus the heir to the Mauryan Empire which once ruled almost all of the Indian subcontinent. After the departure of Mahendra, Ashoka's eldest son, he was supposed to be the heir to the empire, but was blinded by his step-mother, Tishyaraksha, at a young age in jealousy. While he was not able to take the throne, his son, Samprati, became his heir.

Kunala also served as the Viceroy of Taxila during the reign of his father, having been appointed to the position in 235 BC.

Significance of name

Kuṇāla is the name of a Himalayan bird, the 'Painted Snipes'. Kunal also means "bird with beautiful eyes", "someone who sees beauty in everything" or "one with beautiful eyes".

Early life

Due to the death of his birth mother, Padmavati, within a few months of his birth, he was raised by Ashoka's chief queen consort Asandhimitra, who loved him like her own son. Due to this, Asandhimitra is often mistaken to be his birth mother. At the age of eight, Ashoka sent his son to Ujjain, to be brought

up and carry out his princely education, to become the heir to the throne of the Mauryan Empire.

Blinding

When the prince was eight years old, the king wrote (in Prakrit) to the tutors that Kunala should begin his studies. One of Ashoka's wives who wanted to secure the succession to her own son, being then present, took up the letter to read it. She secretly put a dot over the letter 'a', changed Adheeyu into Andheeyu—another word, meaning he must be blinded. Without rereading the letter, the king sealed and dispatched it. The clerk in Ujjayini was so shocked by the contents of this letter that he was unable to read it aloud to the prince. Kunala, therefore, seized the letter and read the cruel sentence of his father. Considering that as yet no Maurya prince had disobeyed the chief of the house, and unwilling to set a bad example, he stoutly put out his eyesight with a hot iron".

Alternatively, some stories explain that Kunala had been sent to Taxila to put down a rebellion, which he managed to do peacefully. But he was similarly blinded through the treacherousness of Ashoka's wife Tishyaraksha.

It is said by some scholars that the letter was sent to Kunal; not believing it, Kunal went to his father. This made King Ashoka angry, finding out that his wife had changed the letter, he sentenced her to death. Kunal then became heir to the throne of Mauryan Empire. It is uncertain whether this is true.

Attempts to claim throne

Years later Kunala came to Ashoka's court dressed as a minstrel accompanied by his favourite wife Kanchanmala. When he greatly pleased the king by his music, the king wanted to reward him. At this, the minstrel revealed himself as prince Kunala and demanded his inheritance. Ashoka sadly objected that being blind, Kunala never could ascend the throne. Thereupon the latter said that he claimed the kingdom not for himself but for his son. "When," cried the king, "has a son been born to you?" "Samprati" (meaning "Just now") was the answer. Samprati accordingly was the name given to Kunala's son, and though a baby, he was appointed Ashoka's successor. However, when Ashoka died, Samprati was too young to rule. Therefore, Ashoka was succeeded by another, older grandson, Dasharatha. After the demise of Dasharatha, Samprati did indeed become Emperor.

It is said that Prince Kunala established a kingdom in the Mithila region on the Indo-Nepal Border. It might be the same place where the present village, Kunauli (earlier known as Kunal Gram) at the bank of Kosi river on the Indo-Nepal Border is situated. There are some historical and archaeological evidences to support this claim.

Portrayal in popular media

A semi-fictionalized portrayal of Kunal's life was produced as a motion picture under the title *Veer Kunal* (1941). *Ashok Kumar*, a Tamil film was produced in 1941 based on the life of Kunal.

Chapter 8

Simuka

Simuka was an Indian king belonging to the Satavahana dynasty. He is mentioned as the first king in a list of royals in a Satavahana inscription at Nanaghat. In the Puranas, the name of the first Andhra (Satavahana) king is variously spelt as Shivmukha, Sishuka, Sindhuka, Chhismaka, Shipraka, Srimukha, etc. These are believed to be corrupted spellings of "Simuka", resulting from copying and re-copying of manuscripts.

Based on available evidence, Simuka cannot be dated with certainty. According to one theory, he lived in 3rd century BCE; but he is generally thought to have lived in the 1st century BCE. Epigraphical evidence strongly suggests a 1st century BCE date for Simuka: Simuka seems to be mentioned as the father the acting king Satakarni in the Naneghat inscription dated to 70-60 BCE, itself considered on palaeographical grounds to be posterior to the Nasik Caves inscription of Kanha (probably Simuka's brother) in Cave 19, dated to 100-70 BCE. Recent analysis of sources puts Simuka´s reign possibly around 120 - 96 BCE.

According to the Puranic lists of future kings, "137 years after the accession of Chandragupta Maurya, the Sungas will rule for 112 years and then the Kanvayanas for 45 years whose last king Susharman will be killed by the Andhra Simuka". If the accession of Chandragupta Maurya is dated to 324 BCE, then Simuka started to rule 294 years later, in 30 BCE.

Period

Simuka is mentioned as the first king in a list of royals in a Satavahana inscription at Naneghat. The various Puranas have different names for the founder of the Andhra dynasty: Shishuka in *Matsya Purana*, Sipraka in *Vishnu Purana*, Sindhuka in *Vayu Purana*, Chhesmaka in *Brahmanda Purana*, and Shudraka or Suraka in Kumarika Khanda of *Skanda Purana*. These are believed to be corrupted spellings of Simuka, resulting from copying and re-copying of manuscripts.

The *Matsya* and *Vayu* Puranas mention that the first Andhra king overthrew the Kanva king Susharman (c. 40–30 BCE). Based on identification of Simuka with this king, some scholars believe that Simuka's reign started in 30 BCE. Scholars supporting this theory include D. C. Sircar, H. C. Raychaudhuri and others.

The *Matsya Purana* mentions that the Andhra dynasty ruled for 450 years. It is known that the Satavahana rule continued till the beginning of the early 3rd century CE. Therefore, the beginning of the Satavahana rule can be dated to 3rd-2nd century BCE. In addition, *Indica* by Megasthenes (350 – 290 BCE) mentions a powerful tribe named "Andarae", whose king maintained an army of 100,000 infantry, 2,000 cavalry and 1,000 elephants. If Andarae is identified with the Andhras, this can be considered additional evidence of Satavahana rule starting in 3rd century BCE. According to this theory, Simuka was an immediate successor of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka (304–232 BCE). According to these scholars, the Kanva ruler Susharman was overthrown by a successor of Simuka. The

Brahmanda Purana states: "the four Kanvas will rule the earth for 45 years; *then* (it) will *again* go to the Andhras". This indicates Satavahanas had been in power before the Kanvas subjugated them; the Kanva rule was ultimately overthrown by a Satavahana king. Scholars supporting this theory include A. S. Altekar, K. P. Jayaswal, V. A. Smith and others.

According to Sudhakar Chattopadhyaya, Simuka was the person who revived the Satavahana rule after the Kanva interregnum, and thus a founder of the 'second' Satavahana dynasty; the compilers of the Puranas have confused his name with the founder of the original dynasty. According to Charles Higham, the coin-based evidence suggests that Simuka's reign ended sometime before 120 BCE. Himanshu Prabha Ray also dates Simuka to somewhere before 100 BCE, Andrew Ollett, in a recent analysis, regards the possible period of his reign as 120 - 96 BCE.

Biography

Not much is known about Simuka. According to Jain legends, he adopted Jainism; but, in the last years of his life, he became a tyrant, for which he was deposed and killed. According to Puranas, last king of Kanva dynasty was killed and succeeded by first king of Andhra dynasty (or Satavahana dynasty). According to the Puranas: "The Andhra Simuka will assail the Kanvayanas and Susarman, and destroy the remains of the Sungas' power and will obtain this earth." He is named as Balipuccha is some texts.

Simuka was succeeded by his brother Kanha, who further extended the empire westward at least as far as Nashik, where an inscription in the name of Kanha is known. According to *Matsya Purana*, Krishna (that is, Kanha) was succeeded by Mallakarni, but according to other Puranas, he was succeeded by Satakarni. The Naneghat cave inscription of Satakarni lists his family members: it mentions Simuka's name, but not that of Kanha. Based on this, historians conclude that Satakarni was Simuka's son, and succeeded Kanha.